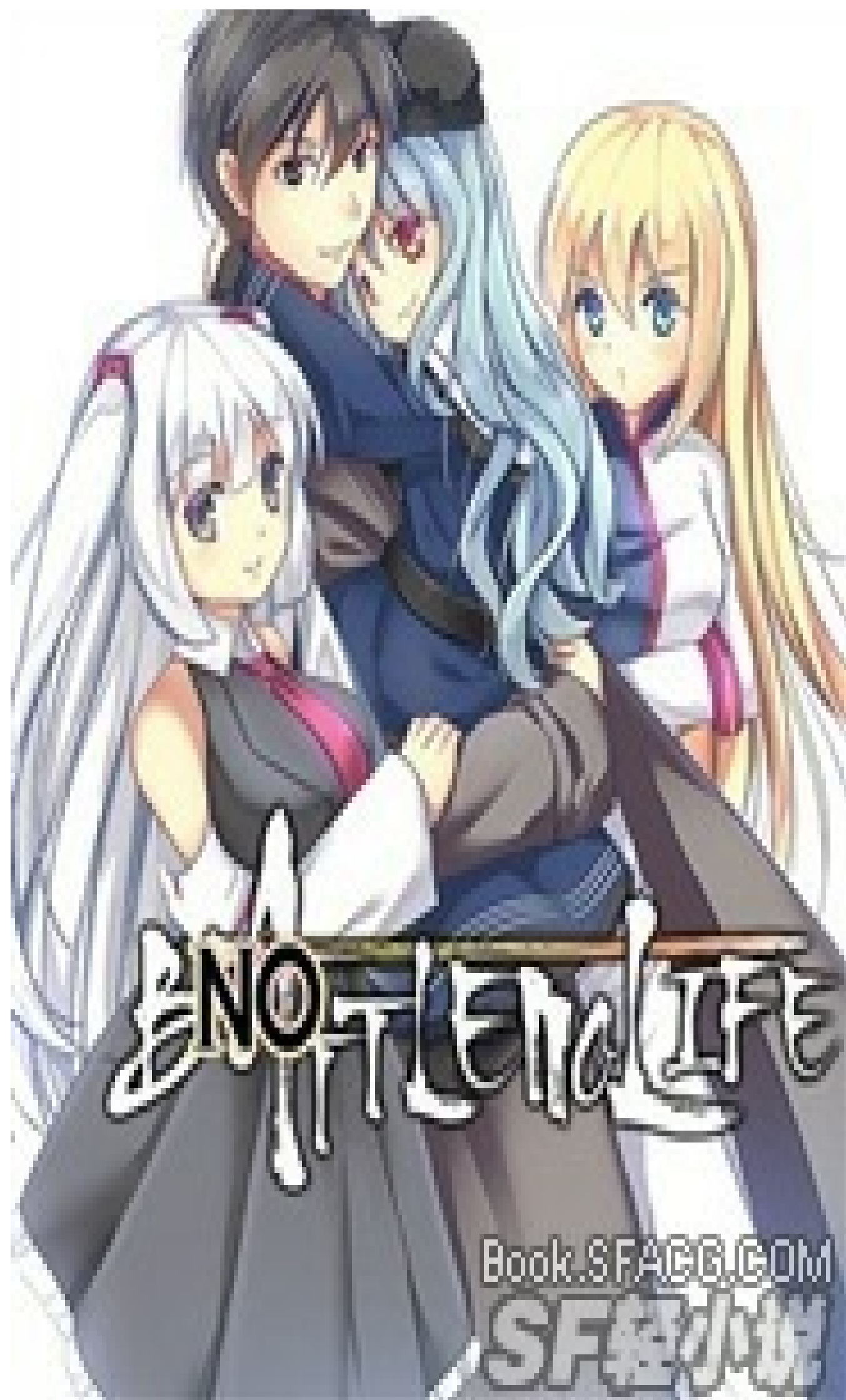


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No Battle No Life - Chapter 00-18

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Prologue: The main character won't make an entrance by falling down from the roof

TL: New project, something like True history! but the setting is 1800s Europe and the mode of transfer is via VRMMORPG. Warning – This is NOTHING like NGNL, it's just the author's poor naming sense.

Synopsis: “France! France! Formerly the strongest nation but now the royal family has fallen! The bastard new king goes around to gamble, fornicate and drink only to owe debts everywhere before running off with his sister-in-law!” “Eh, bro, why haven't I seen you before eh?” “Because I am that new king...” The black haired youth replied as he sat in the Palais des Tuileries with a helpless look...

The hand extended toward the golden haired girl.

It belonged to a black haired youth, and felt a little rough as it gripped the sword tightly, which reminded the girl a little of her father who had passed away, though her own father would never point a sword at her...

The youth stared at the girl silently with his black eyes, and not a shred of warmth could be detected from his face.

Astonishment filled the girl's astounding sapphire blue eyes while the royal insignia on her chest dimmed.

The youth wielded a special sword in his other hand which gave off a pure white light as it pointed downwards, as though it were surrounded by a faint halo of light that was especially striking in the dark night.

Innumerable corpses lay around them, and the continuous waves of cannon fire had stopped some time ago. Only several shouts from soldiers could be heard now and then.

Broken swords and rifles marked the graves of fallen soldiers on the battlefield as tattered flags swayed in the wind which carried the thick smell of blood.

“Haha... Haha...”

— The youth was laughing?

The youth was indeed laughing, as he sheathed his strange sword with a single smooth movement, leaving a white silhouette in the air.

“Welcome to France, my fair lady.”

...

“Who is he... I—”

The girl moaned softly in despair.

She gripped her hands, and the feel of her smooth skin reaffirmed her existence.

White steam filled her vision, which also hid the girl’s tense cute face.

Her white, soft skin was slightly reddened from the heat. Several rose petals floated in the small bathtub where her full breasts floated in the warm water from which water streamed down.

“... Maybe I’ve been in here for too long.”

...

Chapter 1: Lafayette, I'm here... Open the door!

“Uwaa!”

The tents which were clumped together erupted in flames which lit up the snowy night sky as the troops inside descended into chaos from being besieged by a torrent of cannon fire.

Thunderous roars and the clash of swords filled the ears of the youth.

An altered world map would be the best description of what is known as the “world”. And the youth was currently standing in a place called Berlin where tens of thousands were engaged in slaughter and bloodshed.

— A flag emblazoned with a black double headed eagle swayed on the battlefield as the battle continued with neither side gaining a decisive lead.

A shimmering silver blade rapidly swung down at the youth from a cavalryman who had a ferocious look that seemed like a starved beast that had found its prey.

There was nothing that resembled a HP bar in the youth's eyes, and all sensory information gave the impression that he was in reality. Everything was real, even the thick smell of blood and gore that filled his nose.

— Even if this was a game...

The youth's quiver had been exhausted but one arrow left, and his left hand which held a pitch black longbow trembled. In a world where bows and arrows have long since been rendered obsolete, his actions were really strange.

“Your majesty!”

Even though he was already exhausted to the point where it wouldn't be strange if he blacked out, he still forcefully took a deep breath to calm his breathing. He knew that in this world, his abilities were not much more different from that in the real world, except for his battleworn jet black military uniform and his pitch black longbow.

What appeared in front of him was just virtual reality with stupid programs

who could never hope to understand his plans and so could only fall one by one to his forces.

But, this was really unfair.

These 1s and 0s only needed to get one hit through to him to lay waste to all his hard work, while he had to fight off stronger and stronger opponents every round.

— This really sucks, having to risk losing everything every time.

“Ah...!”

The youth rolled to the side of the soldier on horseback, and simultaneously pulled out a dagger from his waist. Though he was gasping for air, he managed to swiftly ready his stance and stab the dagger deeply into the warhorse’s side before it could dodge.

“Ah...!”

The cavalryman was thrown off his warhorse into the air as the warhorse flailed about and cried in pain, and eventually collapsed in a pool of blood that formed from its wound.

The youth did not spare the cavalryman, and charged forth with his face caked with blood and grime. He got on top of the cavalryman and used his hard sturdy bow to strangle him, his face grim and devoid of compassion as always.

“Uwaa...”

The cavalryman uttered a small cry before quickly joining the bled out horse in death.

“Your majesty!”

Just then, the silver haired girl who had been yelling rushed over and prepared to leap at the youth.

...

“Your majesty, wake up!”

“Ah... Why is the alarm clock sounding now!!”

He flipped out of bed as he rubbed the sleep out of his eyes and scratched his

head of black short hair vigorously. He felt an intense desire to destroy the alarm clock by his bedside but he hesitated before stopping the alarm gently.

It was now 20XX, an era where full dive VRMMORPGs were widely accessible and young people could spend months on end inside the games without having to exit for food and drink. Tu had kept this antique alarm clock all this while and destroying it would be a terrible waste.

(TL: Yes Tu is his name.)

He did have attachment to his belongings after all, and that alarm clock was made to project a certain girl's voice which had recreated using software from his memories. That certain girl was also the same girl in his dream.

That dream was not strictly just a dream, and was a recollection of an actual event that Tu had experienced in the game called "world" which was his most vivid and intense experience as it was the closest he had been to death.

That game had incorporated many elements of VRMMORPGs and was highly anticipated. Closed beta invitation codes were highly sought after, and now that it was open beta, its popularity soared.

It was after all a game that had the support of the united earth government which had gathered together technological powerhouses from all over the globe to build this super game. Add to that, constant media coverage which were able to capture the attention of even the disaffected youth.

The most critical factor, however, was that the in-game currency could be directly and easily exchanged for real world money.

And the connection console used for this game, which looked like a high pressure oxygen chamber from the previous century, was actually able to provide nourishment for gamers, on top of taking care of waste and even giving haircuts.

— This was all thanks to nanomachines that were inside the console, though Tu, who had only just graduated from high school, did not understand how it worked.

— Who cares though, as long as he can play the game. Now that he is free, it's time for some hardcore gaming!

When Tu thought of this, he excitedly rushed to the toilet to have a shower.

His seemingly endless high school exams were finally over and the mountains of preparatory materials which were covered in black ink from notes and practice were still piled up on his desk.

— Supposedly his grandfather had been through all this as well, this exam tradition of China was truly persistent.

“Faster! Why am I wasting my time thinking about such things...”

Tu shook his head to rid himself of thoughts that would get in the way of his gaming and quickly put on his clothes. Though technological advances have been made, normal daily living is still mostly the same as it was a century ago.

— Who knows where those bureaucrats in the united government spent the tax dollars on...

— But then again, it didn't matter. What did was that he had 3 months to go crazy on gaming which his parents would have no objections to now that he had finished his exams.

“Good thing I had gotten a closed beta code that was only given to about a dozen people. If not, I would probably have to waste a lot of time and money on getting an open beta invitation...”

Open beta invitations were restricted from online sales, and any offline spots which offered to sell them were assailed by a sea of hopeful buyers, and it was said to be such a long queue at all places that there were many professional ‘queuers’ there to offer their services.

In any case, queuing and the like were irrelevant to a seasoned gamer of the “world” like Tu, since he was a participant in the game from the very beginning. Though he didn't do very well at first, he got much better with practice as time went by...

The earlier he entered, the better, since there was the choice of one's starting country. He couldn't understand the game designers' decisions to wipe out all data and settings, any closed beta participant would definitely want to return to their selected country with their closed beta data!

— My Prussia which I have poured in so much blood, sweat and tears, you must wait for the return of your Kaiser.

“Initiate connection!”

The endless grass plains as the backdrop for the login stage was truly nostalgic huh...

“Hello, Tu!”

On hearing a crisp female voice, Tu spread his arms out and twirled on the spot.

When first registering in the game, manual scan of each player’s body has to be done and you would essentially play as a character that looked like your real world self. Thereafter, login would be done based on face recognition.

This was for a safety measure to deter hacking as the in-game currency was equivalent to real world money after all and many black hats were closely following this game. This measure was rather restrictive but it was the work of the government and it could not afford to screw it up.

“Please select your country. As you are a closed beta participant, you may choose to be the ruler of a country.”

— It’s here it’s here, the thing I’ve been waiting for.

Tu was brimming with excitement as this was what he had been thinking of for many days and nights and now it was before him.

This game’s world was actually based on a modified version of the real world, and set in the 18th-19th century and the world would progress along based on historical events and the players’ actions.

The wars and conflicts of countries in the modern era, the politics and machinations... All in all, this was the ideal game for Tu, who was an ardent history buff.

— Cat ear maids? Silver haired girl in black knee socks?

What the hell am I thinking about...

Tu shook his head and gave an answer without having to think.

“Prussia! Prussia! Prussia!”

It was the place he had worked so hard in and there were many memorable places and NPCs after all. He wondered what happened to the table in the Schloss Sanssouci and whether it was covered in dust by now.

(TL: Of all things he misses in a palace in a game, it's a table? Please let me know if there is some special table in the Schloss Sanssouci.)

By Tu's reckoning, the so called rulers, were just a title that gave some fringe benefits and did not have an actual effect on gameplay. Though the game website had only stated these titles without giving details on the benefits, making it seem unnecessarily mysterious. But at least this game had no money sink like a gacha feature.

— If not, the cash-strapped Tu would not be able to get far in the game...

— Prussia! Prussia! My Prussia! My double headed eagle!

(TL: From what I can find online, the correct coat of arms should be a single headed eagle. The author may have mistaken the era or he thinks 2 heads is cooler as the setting for the game is actually just before Napoleon.)

“Sorry, but Prussia has already been selected by another player.”

“Haa!?”

Tu who had been overly excited, suddenly became deflated, before being filled with rage.

“What the fuck... Who was the idiot who stole my Prussia?!”

— To have been quicker than me, that guy must also be from the closed beta. But to have picked Prussia, he must have balls huh.

Tu was really mad, and he stamped his feet but found that it was no use and he quickly calmed down.

He had indeed thought about this situation before, but he had not believed that it would actually come to pass.

And so he came to a decision.

— Even if Prussia isn't available, I must match up to my closed beta days!

“Sorry, Prussia has been selected by another player. Please choose again, or join the Prussia team.”

The system reply resounded again, and Tu smiled as he already knew what he should choose.

“France it is then! The France which I beat black and blue!”

In the game’s setting, France was formerly a dominant world power but had become weak to the point where it was the weakest country. Its lands were few, and was engaged in conflict with countries in all directions.

— But it’s because it’s a challenge that I am compelled to try my utmost to win. This is probably the same feeling as when I was thrown into Prussia back then.

“Please confirm your selection. After you have made your selection, you cannot change it.”

“No more questions! France it is!”

“You will now be transferred to the Palais des Tuileries, we hope you enjoy the game.”

Chapter 2: The law of flags always persists...

France, Paris

“This must be the Palais des Tuileries.”

After a brief period of darkness, Tu found himself in large hall with large marble pillars. This was probably the main lounge.

The aspect of this game that garnered the most praise amongst reviewers and gamers was its unique player point of view. To quote a certain famous review, “Though it is more reality than virtual, this brings back the nature of games. This game was born out of real life, but it has itself birthed a new world that is like real life.”

— That is to say, there is nothing at all!

There is no red HP bar at the top right hand corner, no blue MP bar at the bottom, no zooming feature, no God’s eye view, no social or chat functions, even the NPC names weren’t displayed...

— What one saw in the game was exactly like what one would see in the real world.

But it was this that made the game challenging and so much more interesting. In-game currency was equivalent to real world money after all, how could the game be easy?

When he first joined the closed beta, Tu had kept reflecting these ‘serious issues’ to the developers but he soon got used to it, and even grew to liked it.

— This is how you make the game feel real! The smooth ice-cold marble, the exquisite art pieces... Everything here felt real to the touch, and Tu could save a lot of time just by playing this game instead of going to museums.

“Something’s not right eh... Seems like this is the 19th century or so... Right.”

Tu who was about to enjoy the feel of the world after a long while suddenly realised a very serious problem.

— 19th century... The King of France...

— Something feels very ominous.

“Hu...”

The biggest challenge in this game was that it would always spring some special ‘curveballs’ on you from time to time— Of course, Tu often received these curveballs with his face more often than not, and so he took a deep breath upon realising the possible trouble ahead.

— Though I might not meet with any troublesome events anyway, for safety’s sake, I might as well check it first.

“Where is the Queen?”

“Queen? Your majesty does not have an empress yet.”

A maid with short beige hair answered Tu, and only then did he feel relieved, since Marie Antoinette, the beauty who said ‘let them eat cake’, wasn’t here, Tu’s head would safely stay on his shoulders.

(TL: Since Marie Antoinette was executed at the turn of the century, Tu isn’t that off. And one of the first things that comes to mind when one mentions modern era France would be her and the revolution then. The next is—)

— And then,

“Your majesty!!”

A frantic retainer rushed in, falling over here and there as he did so. Hearing his fearful scream, Tu knew that something bad was about to come.

He was struck dumb momentarily by the retainer’s entrance before he ignored any court manners and rushed up to pull the retainer up from the ground.

“What is it?!”

“Run your majesty, the mob... The mob is coming for this place!!”

— And to think I was still celebrating just now, in the end I still have to deal with this!

“Hah...?!”

I’ve only been here for a few minutes! I haven’t even had a good look at this maid! And I’m going to be killed by a mob just like that?!

— This wouldn't be the so-called benefits that closed beta players would have right... Can I refuse this benefit!

So unlucky, so unlucky...

“Your majesty, there's a battalion stationed outside the city...”

— Don't leave your sentence hanging, you're a royal retainer damn it, why is your stamina so poor!

— Forget it, no time left! Time to run first!

As Tu thought so, he hurriedly followed the retainer who guided them out of the palace in a sprint. He quickly got on a dark horse and kicked it violently as they galloped out of the city in a frenzy. The retainer too got on a horse and followed behind closely.

This retainer ought to be an NPC, though his falling and tumbling actions were so much more smoother and natural than any NPC Tu had seen. In all honesty, Tu felt that nobody could fall as brilliantly as that NPC did even in reality.

This game was really good, to give quest hints that don't spoil. That crazed mob was nothing more than a bunch of starved and armed bandits who think they can do whatever they want just because they have a few guns. When I bring my proper army over, I'll sweep through you lot easy.

But in the end, the weapons that even the army wielded were mere muskets and were ill-suited to facing off against a numerous enemy, and I had to consider my own position now as the emperor when dealing with the unruly masses... When the time comes, all I need to do is capture the leaders of the most extreme factions and the remainder should scatter.

— Watch as I, the King of France, raise the second regular army of Europe and teach you what it means to be a proper subject!

(TL: Not too sure on the accuracy of this. All I know is most armies then were poorly trained and relied on conscription.)

“When the time comes, shall I erect a monument to commemorate my victory?”

Just as he thought so, Tu had almost reached their destination. But the sight

that greeted him was so unbelievably terrible that he wanted to slap himself for his earlier arrogance.

The barracks were crumbling and full of holes as though they had been in a state of disrepair for years. And the flag that was the symbol of honour seemed like it would fall off anytime.

Leading this “army” to defeat the rebels? If I could even make it out alive, that would be a miracle!

— If they were to count the number of people who died of hunger and disease here, France would tremble.

(TL: I could only find the source for this in a Chinese translation of “Napoleon Bonaparte: An Intimate Biography”. It’s a line apparently written by a general in the barracks just before Napoleon’s arrival. See:

<https://book.douban.com/reading/10321465/>)

This line suddenly floated up in Tu’s mind but he could not remember who said it.

He turned to the still panting retainer and smiled.

“I say, why did you bring your liege to this god damned place huh?”

As he said this, Tu gently patted the retainer’s shoulders upon which the retainer gulped and held his breath.

— Before I turn my blade to external threats, I must ascertain my internal affairs.

“Are you one of the rebels?!”

Tu was enraged in an instant as he felt like he was made fun of and he instinctively reached down to his waist only to find that because he had hurriedly followed that fellow out, he hadn’t brought anything and there was only air hanging at his waist...

— Why won’t God let me get rid of this traitor, I must purge him for France!

“Your majesty... Go and talk to them. Let these brave warriors fight for you, your majesty.”

The retainer managed to squeeze these words out in between his gasps and only then did Tu calm down.

“Talk?”

On hearing the retainer’s words, Tu felt like he finally understood the flow of events and came to the conclusion that this should be part of the tutorial.

— But I’ve never heard of such a tutorial during the closed beta though who knows what the developers would pull now that the player population is expected to be much larger...

— Since that’s the case, I just have to do it. At least my French here is good so those people should be able to understand what I’m saying.

(TL: Unexplained game mechanic, but basically it probably works like any “language cheat” in world transfer stories. If they managed to make full dive VR commercially viable, I would assume they fixed Google translate.)

“Is that the new king? Why is it someone with black hair?”

(TL: Caucasian Europeans don’t have black hair?)

“Who knows? I bet he’s just here to say some grand speech. I hope he can at least give me a pair of boots though, this pair of mine is completely worn out...”

Tu listened to the soldiers’ conversations from the side and found some boxes that had yet to rot which he used to make a stage. Though he was rather pleased with his 180+ cm height, standing on a stage trumped not standing on one after all in making the mood.

(TL: 180+ isn’t that rare for an East Asian... Depending on where you go.)

“Brave warriors of France! Now is the time to fight, for your nation is in peril!”

The soldiers lazing about below the stage didn’t pay Tu any heed, and there were even sarcastic comments such as ‘not this again’ and the like.

Tu was sure now that this was a game. How could there be such impudent and lazy soldiers in reality...

But he could not lose his temper. If he were to lose this army which was his last card, he could only face the mob alone and hope that they were like the small

fries in Dynasty Warrior...

When Moses talked to the people of Israel of the Promised Land, didn't those short-sighted people have this very attitude? I must solve the problem of morale fast.

But who in this battalion knew the newly ascended king?

These troops had set up camp in this remote place over 3 months ago and had been thoroughly raided many times by the superior Prussian army, which Tu was then leading as the Kaiser.

A quarter were badly injured and out of combat, another quarter were captured or dead and there were quite a number of deserters as well. The numbers were unreliable as even the officers who were in charge of these administrative duties had deserted. In the months they were stationed here, because of the chaos that had been swirling in France, no one from the government had ever bothered about them!

These were troops that still clung on to what little honour they had left despite the hardships they had endured, though Tu was not able to understand this so quickly. Their equipment were dented and full of holes, their artillery consisted of just 20 mountain guns, their cavalry had only 300 warhorses that could still run, and the supplies they had could only sustain these 20,000 or so people for another month.

The officers too were observing the black haired youth bearing the royal insignia. One young cavalry officer in particular caught Tu's attention.

— No way...

Tu quickly changed his script on seeing the officer, acting on a hunch that he himself only half-believed.

"Brave warriors! Follow me and slaughter my enemies, and you shall be rewarded with gold and titles! Your king swears in the name of God that you will receive the rewards you deserve!"

The soldiers below the stage slowly turned towards Tu and even those who lying down had sat up, as they all looked utterly surprised at the words of the black haired youth. This was a good start, I shall continue riding the wave then.

“The enemy has pillaged and burned and done much evil! How many innocent lives have been lost up till now? How many more fields shall be consumed by flames?”

“All brave warriors who will suppress those crazed bandits shall be remembered by me, by the people, and by all of France! Those who sacrifice their lives shall have their families taken care of by the nation, and their names will be engraved on the Luxor Obelisk in the Place de la Concorde, forever to be respected by all!”

The officers’ eyes had changed quite a bit and Tu could see hope in them.

— They had been struggling to protect their pride all this while. Well then, let me grant you all both pride and wealth in the name of the king!

“Long live the king!”

The solemn atmosphere below the stage was broken by this loud cheer. Tu looked over to where it came from and found that it was from the young cavalry officer from before.

“Long live the king! Long live the king!”

“Let us show your majesty how we fight.”

The black haired king seemed to have ignited the soldiers’ ardour and they all got up and slung their muskets on their officers’ orders. The drummers began sounding the drums that had a layer of dust of them. Though the troops weren’t too orderly as they gathered together, they were still decently put together.

“Hear the orders of your king!”

They were just waiting for death to come, either by hunger or disease. Moreover, there was no guarantee that the mob would spare them after they had succeeded. For the soldiers, their best bet was to throw in their lot with the king.

“Bring out all the cannons! Load them up and follow your king to victory!”

Tu mounted the horse, and once again reached down to his waist on instinct and made to draw his sword but Tu had nothing but a dusty royal military uniform.

So he had no choice but to clench his fist and raise it high in the air as he yelled out to the soldiers.

“What’s your name?”

Just then Tu rode up to the cavalry officer who had intrigued him from before.

“Your majesty! I am Joachim Murat!”

— Murat, Napoleon’s brother-in-law? Could it be that a player actually had such a name?

“Murat, is it? Follow your liege and charge to your heart’s content.”

Chapter 3: A general who is unwilling to be an actor is not a good king!

TL: Don't expect this to be anywhere near as fast as anything else I'm doing. The word count for this is lower than any other project I'm doing but this is the hardest because the author writes in a way that is a pain to translate.

France, Paris

"Bread! Bread!"

(TL: You have no idea how tempting it is to put in croissant or baguette instead...)

Just a few months ago, the streets had been a battlefield just like now. The rebellious mob was easily 4 times the size of the regular army Tu had under his command. Tu had now divided his army into several small squads and they lay in wait at several key junctions on the way to the Palais des Tuileries for the mob.

Though they were in a rush, all the cannons and the soldiers in their torn and tattered uniforms were in position on the roofs of the buildings, using what cover they could from the sparse trees.

Unable to find the newly ascended king, the mob was unwittingly headed for the direction that Tu had predicted while the remnants of the nobles that had been raided by the mob were trembling as they held their breath and waited.

Government was completely paralysed and the officials were all scared out of their wits while the vastly outnumbered police had long since withdrawn before the crazed crowd.

"Down with the king! Down with the king!"

The reddish hue of the setting sun shone down on the crazed mob, leaving multiple shadows that made it seem as though their numbers were several times more.

"Bread! Bread!"

In the months before, everytime the people of Paris took action, they would be met by the battle-hardened troops and so they made little progress each time. If it weren't for the Prussian attacks that led to the rearming of France, the revolution would have succeeded long ago.

Tu was very particular with his battle preparations. Even though he does think of this as a game, he is the kind of person who prepares fully for anything. In just a few hours, he had laid out the preparations to turn the place where his army would face the mob into a real battle field.

Yet, Tu was not amongst the troops that lay in ambush nor did he prepare himself to see the tragic sight of war which he had seen many times before.

"Your majesty, why did you pull back with these troops? Those rebels have not yet..."

"Murat, numbers are not everything."

After setting up the ambush, he told them he would be inspecting the other troops but had pulled back and was now watching over the battlefield from a position that was not too far off with some of the light cavalry.

It did indeed seem weird for him to be slacking off in some suburban district while the mob was rampaging about in the city.

Tu was riding leisurely about on his horse, pacing the streets they were in. The cavalry behind him however, were all battle ready and stared at the farmhouses about them with a gaze filled with battle-lust.

All the buildings were sealed from within and the commoners that were uninvolved with the revolt could only bunker down and hope for the chaos to pass without involving them.

— This is good. Now all I need to do is wait for the time when the cannons fire.

"What are you doing here?"

"Uncle? Can you help me find something?"

Completely outside of Tu's expectations, a little farm girl with long, wheat coloured hair tied back in a braided ponytail fearlessly approached Tu.

Her eyes were filled with tears, perhaps she was crying because she had lost

something.

Because this is a game, literally anything can happen? This might be some small easter egg from the developers...

“Your majesty?!”

Ignoring Murat’s surprised cry, Tu dismounted and walked over to the little girl and knelt down beside her.

“Uncle will help you out. What is it you’re looking for?”

“3 small wooden blocks... Jeanne d’Arc was using them to make a big wooden house.”

So it’s just a couple of wooden blocks. But where was this little girl’s family at such a dangerous time?

Speaking of which, was it me, or did I hear this girl call herself Jeanne d’Arc?

“Your majesty? The battle is about to begin, what are you doing there?”

Tu gestured to Murat to get him to shut up, and then he rubbed the little girl’s head.

— I don’t really care if it’s the saint from a few hundred years ago but this little girl’s 3-D model is really cute huh...

“Where is your daddy and mummy?”

“Daddy and mummy are at home waiting for Jeanne to go back. Jeanne is such a bad girl, *wu wu*...” The little girl said tearfully in a delicate voice.

“Don’t cry don’t cry, uncle will help you find them, those uncles over there will help too.” Tu said as he pointed at Murat and the rest of the light cavalry

Murat was bewildered at Tu. It was about to become a field of slaughter soon nearby where the ambush was yet and his king was giving grand, rousing speeches and giving proper commands just a short while ago but yet he was like this now.

“Oh, aren’t they here? Don’t cry, little Jeanne.”

Tu had only turned about and found that 3 rectangular wooden blocks behind him.

— Red white and blue?

“Red... White... Blue...”

When Tu put those blocks together, a familiar sight greeted him. Except that the France now was not using the so-called tricolore.

(TL: Napoleon restored the tricolore to prominence. Previously it was red. The Bourbons used white.)

— Was this tricolore a gift from the saint who saved France? I must say, this little easter egg is pretty interesting huh...

Boom!

A single shot rang out and shattered the silence, with scores more following shortly.

“Troops! Advance with your king!”

“Uncle! Thank you!”

After he stuffed the wooden blocks into the little girl’s hands, Tu mounted his black warhorse and charged forth toward the battlefield.

...

Even if he knew it was a game, even if he had seen this many times before, Tu was still not used to the scene of carnage that was now before him. Tu, who was supposed to be the ultimate commanding officer, was not there then. If he had been, would he still have been able to give the order to fire?

The sound of cannonfire had receded and shrapnel littered the wide, spacious streets that were dyed red with blood. The mob had been scattered and in just the span of half an hour of fighting, only a few rebels, who were unable to move due to severe injuries, were left in the street.

— When Tu had made his move, fear fill the eyes of the rebels who saw him.

— This was the king they had declared they would bring down, and they would be at the mercy of whatever actions he would take next.

Very shocking actions.

“Your majesty, the rebels have been cleaned out!”

A fairly young officer excitedly reported to his king. He looked like the sincere and honest type, though a little dull, and seemed to think that his king was here to inspect the glorious deeds he had achieved.

“Who ordered you to open fire?!”

Yet he did not receive a word of praise. Instead, he was being yelled at by the young king who had dismounted quickly. The young officer was at a loss and could not understand why the king who had resolutely issued the order to fire had now become a pacifist.

Tu raised his hand up high, as though he was about to slap the young officer.

Pa!

The palm did not land on the officer, instead it landed on the king himself. The burning sensation on his face did not stop him from continuing as he continued walking and faced the stunned troops.

“Your majesty...?”

What followed was even more shocking for Tu ran over to the streets that were strewn with corpses with a look that was filled with despair and sorrow, as though his heart was being torn apart.

“Uwaa... Why! The people were not the ones in the wrong, it was all me!”

Right before the surviving rebels and the troops, tears streamed down the face of the king that was not yet a mature man as he held up a hand that was caked in fresh blood.

“It’s my fault! It’s all my fault! I couldn’t feed and clothe everyone! it’s all my fault!” He cried out, as though he were drowning in sorrow.

— Though it’s a game, I still must do my very best. That said, the last time I cried was probably in primary school.

“Your majesty?”

The brown haired young officer from before had been transfixed up till now by the tremendous show of emotion from the king and only just now regained his senses and asked his king.

— Just then, the king stopped crying.

“You, are all soldiers who should protect France! Remember that!”

Tu slowly got up, and though he didn't seem to need it, he used both hands to press against the ground as he did so and when he completely stood up, his hands were steeped in blood.

“Now your king has the blood of the people on his hands just like you. He could have stopped this but he didn't, remember that! We are the army of France and we will never point our guns at innocent French citizens ever again!”

Most of the troops did not seem to understand what he meant nor what their king was planning, though they did listen obediently.

“The army of France...”

“Treat the injured people.”

“But your majesty! ...”

“Except for the true enemy, I do not wish to punish any innocent civilians...”

— In the past, the army would always swear fealty to the royal family... Yet, what was this king doing?

“Take those trai... People to the hospital!”

Tu stopped his speech and calmed down his emotions with difficulty while those rebels who were unable to retreat were put on stretchers. All were dumbfounded at the young king.

The next day, this news spread throughout the streets of Paris.

Chapter 4: There's no way I'm doing everything right?

France, Paris, Palais des Tuileries

“Just motley crowd with a few guns and yet I had to waste so much effort.”

Tu was in the main hall of the Palais and was very infuriated at the big show he had to put up in front of those people who were most likely NPCs, as well as the depletion of his national treasury to reward the troops who had helped him quell the uprising.

Though the troops and officers who had received what was equivalent to years of wages had all declared that they wished to continue fighting for him, Tu did not actually want to see them again. He couldn't believe the extent to which the previous king had wasted the national wealth to the point where there was barely any left now...

— Just who were the “rebels” huh?

“Eh, now then...”

Tu opened his skills tab. One game design issue that was supposedly part of the designers' intent to create a realistic experience was that players had a limited time to check out their skill details in the skills tab. After the first login, they only had 3 days to confirm and check the details of their skills.

— But this wasn't the sort of game where you could level up so whatever I see will probably be the same as that in the closed beta.

“What the heck is this?!”

Tu who had opened his skills tab had found a new category called “King's Privilege”. He hadn't seen this before in the closed beta, could this be one of the rumoured closed beta benefits?

“The king's majesty?”

— This skill name, why does it sound so... Maa, it's still within acceptable limits.

“Let me see, you can forcefully summon all forces under your command to

your position, limited to 2 uses per battle.”

— Tu nearly spat out.

“What the fuck, isn’t this a cheat? ... With this skill, can’t I just swim across the English Channel, make my way to Buckingham Palace and just occupy the place?”

But Tu’s flight of fantasy was stopped short by his own rationality. After all what could one do with just a few thousand men? Even if he did occupy Buckingham Palace, he would only be met with the eventual fate of capture or death.

This skill felt like the ‘flying general’ in Chinese Chess.

(TL: In Chinese Chess, there is a rule that when moving your pieces, your ‘General’ piece (equivalent to the king piece in International Chess) cannot face the other side’s ‘General’ piece in the same file without any piece in between. This is a rule to enforce checkmate.)

“At least this is actually useful...”

But looking at this, Tu finally understood the nature of the so-called closed beta player benefits. The benefits were actually special skills, which explains why there is an absence of information on them on the net. This was, after all, the equivalent of a national secret as it could potentially turn the tide of war if used appropriately.

Each nation in this world probably had a different skill since each nation had their own specialty. England had naval superiority while Prussia was known for its infantry...

This information, however, could be easily found online so strategies and counter-strategies revolving around the strengths and weaknesses of each nation were commonplace amongst conflicts in the closed beta.

Of course, this world did not just involve raw armed conflict. Each player had access to a diverse talent tree which players could choose to train in and advance down branches that would further lead to smaller branches etc, with skills such as swordsmanship, marksmanship etc.

But this only raised the combat capability of the player. As for the strategies employed and commanding the army during battle... It all came down to the player himself.

And training a skill in this world only led to effects which weren't too different from the real world. For example, training swordsmanship wouldn't lead to any weird blade techniques or skills.

The only thing that was different was the time taken to reach a high level of proficiency. Tu had taken only a year in closed beta to master archery.

— This had raised quite the commotion during closed beta. Who would train their skill in an outdated weapon such as the bow in a game which was set in the era of guns and cannons?

Maa, it was a game after all. Tu had felt as though his strength had increased immensely in the real world after playing in the closed beta but he dismissed this as mistaken perception.

Tu continued browsing through his personal information.

“Army limit: 5,000 (This is also the upper limit that one can transport using “King’s Privilege”)”

Army limit was the upper limit for how many troops a player could command at any one time. Normally, this limit was set to 3,000 but 5,000 was probably yet another small benefit for closed beta players.

Because every player had a limit to how many troops he could command, each battle requires one to gather multiple players to create a formidable army. Of course, if you were good enough, you could try to lead your few thousand against an enemy that could number in the hundreds of thousands, but nobody would do that after all.

— This is similar to reality I guess. You need enough officers to properly command a large and powerful army after all. Layers and layers of command just like the pyramid.

Death here was of course not actual death but if you died in combat, you were locked up in a small black room for 24 hours. If you were captured, not only did it mean a great loss of face, the other side might make absurd demands.

But this was only hearsay, as Tu had never actually died nor was he ever captured in battle. He had never heard of anyone who had died in combat either. There were a few players who gave up though, probably those who couldn't accept humiliating conditions for release after they were captured.

— Hai, or perhaps those people were too mentally weak.

“Your majesty!”

An officer with brown, short hair stood before Tu, who was closely observing the man's looks as he kept getting the feeling that he had seen his likeness in a portrait before.

“Michel Ney?”

Though he had asked this question to test out his hypothesis, Tu kept a serious expression on.

“Yes, your esteemed majesty!” He said as he bowed slightly in respect. Ney's reply gave Tu a complicated feeling.

— Do players like using historical names? First Murat, now Ney... Looks like there are quite a lot of history buffs like myself huh.

— Or could it be that my judgement is wrong? But that can be tested,

“No need for all these cumbersome formalities from today forth, France needs you.”

Tu said with a respectful tone as he patted the shoulders of the man who was about a decade or so older.

“Help me find these people, as quickly as you can.”

He gave Ney a piece of paper that was completely filled with names of historical figures that he could remember who were present in this era.

“Yes your majesty, it will be done!”

Ney took the piece of paper and gave a top notch military salute before he left.

“Now, time to talk a walk down Talent District. Perhaps I might even bump into Robespierre... Ahaha.”

After Ney left, Tu felt that it was still early, and immediately made his way to

the Central Area— The so-called Talent District.

According to information on the game website, there was still some time before the restriction on open warfare would be lifted.

That is to say now is the time for every country to make their preparations, advance national development and gather talented individuals. And the Central Area that was floating in the sky was where every unaffiliated player gathered, which the reason why it is called the Talent District.

— This period of time is also the only time when one can see all the information on players in the Talent District. Once this period is over, the Central Area will be shut down and you can't see the information of other players at all...

“Let's see what treasures I can find, haha, maybe I might see some familiar faces.”

— Familiar faces?

The silver haired girl's face that popped up instantly in Tu's face made him blush but he quickly regained control.

— Thinking about it is no use.

...

“Huu... There really are a lot of people here huh.”

The moment he arrived in the Talent District, the sight of bustling unending crowds that greeted Tu gave him a shock. Open beta really is amazing huh, closed beta was nothing compared to this!

“Excuse me, excuse me, coming through here!”

Tu was able to squeeze through the crowds, and he browsed their information with great difficulty as he did so, as he felt overwhelmed with the sheer amount of information.

— It's all thanks to my experience in browsing websites quickly, or I would be exhausted by this...

“Huu... All of a sudden, I feel like this is way too many people.”

Just as he thought so, a familiar name captured his eyeballs.

“T...u?”

This name gave him a sense of connection with the player since it was his name as well after all. Could this be fate? Tu decided to follow the arrangement of the heavens and browsed this person’s information in detail.

“Management, policy... Good, good!”

“The king of France? You need me for something?”

(TL: This is kind of like stalking that cute girl in the same class on Facebook and then she comes and sits beside you.)

This low voice came from a skinny, bespectacled young man. Behind his glasses were deep, clear eyes and he wore a clean, neat white shirt without any gaudy accessories about him. Though he did not say much else, he was probably the one Tu was looking for...

— Finding talented partners is like finding a lover, the first impression is the most important...

And this interesting fellow even has the same name as me. Brother, this must be fate.

Though Tu was against the practice of selecting people by his first impression of them employed by hirers, he still committed this mistake when it came to be his turn to be the hirer. There were too many people after all, and to look through everyone’s information one by one was way too tiring and national development could not wait.

— Even though this is a game, I must still give it my all.

“Un, very good. I’ve decided to welcome you to join my country. But if you want to get a better offer, then pass the test I will be putting you through.”

“Well then... Thank you, your majesty.”

Tu was not sure if basing this decision on his judgement was appropriate. He was not, after all, an expert in the matters on governance.

“There’s a small shop there and it isn’t so crowded so let’s discuss this further over there... Is there anything you can show me so I can have a better understanding of your capabilities?”

“This will decide your role and responsibilities so think carefully about it.”

(TL: Walk me through your CV / Show me your portfolio.)

Before they began their discussions, Tu was still concerned and gave these instructions to the man.

... After the discussions had concluded and the man had presented his overall plans for France in detail with concrete steps at every stage and specific milestones to be met, Tu’s concerns were allayed and he patted the man’s shoulders as he said.

“You are in charge of the government of France from now on.”

— He had not seen wrongly. This man had avoided all the pitfalls Tu had fallen into in the closed beta, and did not employ any weird or fancy policies to try and show off his creativity.

— I believe that with him, France will be able advance national development greatly. Without this guy, I would probably have to sleep for 6 hours a day like what Napoleon said.

(TL: Napoleon’s quote on sleep: Six for a man, seven for a woman, eight for a fool.)

Chapter 5: Do you know what is cramming? Cramming is a king's romance (lol)

TL: Filler paragraphs, filler paragraphs everywhere... So much set up though, the later chapters better be worth it...

France, Paris, Palais des Tuileries

“This topic is now settled, onto the next item on our agenda...”

Seated around the oval table were about 20-odd people. There were people of all ages, some exhibited the fearlessness of youth while others held the glimmer of wisdom.

Their attire was mostly plain, nor did they wear wigs for the youth who sat at the head of the table wore a plain military uniform without any accessories or decorations whatsoever. If their leader did not dress himself up, how could they?

A few high level officers from the military, including the young king, were there to represent the king in listening on the legislative discussion. They too wore their military uniforms without their gold aiguillette or medals.

The youth was now wearing a face of calm as he surveyed the members of the Constitutional Convention, that the newly appointed Prime Minister Tu had gathered together, as they decided how the country would function henceforth.

Name, birth, looks or factions were unimportant in deciding their appointment. Whether the role they took on was more or less critical, all of them were talented and capable individuals. All were treated equally and given opportunities to prove themselves whether they were “original inhabitants” of the world or players.

— Each and every one of them were selected based on their abilities alone and were then officially appointed by the king.

— After a few months of chaos and teething pains, a bourgeoisie regime was forming under the king...

The Convention members, thus, had different origins and specialties. Some

were players who had an uncanny knowledge of the law while others were famous original inhabitants, or NPCs.

“I object to this clause!”

“Oh? Share with us your thoughts.”

“I think that...”

As the highest ranking official in the government in name, and the commander-in-chief of the French army, the youth did not actually speak all that much. Most of his contributions were also regarding military affairs.

During the meeting, Tu kept wondering why he was needed to oversee the meeting when these people were so effective. It was lucky that his military reforms had passed smoothly which was also why he didn't bother to stop the endless debates amongst the Convention members.

The old royal French army was currently undergoing a drastic transformation, partially thanks to the experience it had with the Prussian army. Apart from careful selection and promotion of talents within the officer corps, the French army's artillery was undergoing a rapid upgrading.

National education that focused on loyalty to the country was infused, the rebellion incident was used as a springboard to shake up the military leadership, the rank structure underwent reforms and the bulk of the military budget went into the land forces of which the focus was on building a formidable artillery...

Only after he had finished planning and executing all these changes did Tu realised how much he was doing himself. And now, he turned his attention to administrative reform. Though he hadn't gotten much sleep these days, Tu's excitement and fervor had not diminished in the least.

They were currently meeting in the glorious Palais des Tuileries which the previous king had ruled the government from. Now, the new king was ruling with the government there.

The silk drapes and red golden luster from the carpet that was a reminder of the former decadence, was a stark contrast from the austere garb that everyone there was wearing.

Ever since Paris was attacked by Prussia, France was engulfed in chaos and civil war as regions outside of Paris disobeyed central commands while Paris itself became a giant military encampment with factional disputes and conflicts between revolutionary and royalist forces. Inflation was rampant and goods were scarce.

The France now was like a woman who had grown tired of unending romantic misadventures and was now returning to the arms of the one who could keep her in control and maintain stability.

Though this might not be an appropriate analogy for the one that France needs, who is currently stifling a yawn, is admittedly not experienced in the matters of love— For he has never had a lover before.

— The sparks that danced about Paris were currently aflame but whether they would continue burning strongly would depend entirely on the youth.

“Alright, let us begin the next item!”

Austro-Hungarian Empire, in the woods in Vienna

“Know... Your... Place! Waa!”

A dull crashing sound rang out as a razor sharp sabre fell heavily onto the grass. It belonged to the young man wearing a military uniform who currently lying motionless in pain on the grass.

“I’ve said it before. As a knight of the empire, I will not accept a foolish man... You think too highly of yourself.”

The golden haired young girl’s face was devoid of emotions, not even disgust. Her waist-length honey coloured hair seemed to emit golden rays of light as she stood under the setting sun.

“That man... Who could he be...”

The girl threw the branch in her hand at the side of the man on the ground. It was truly humiliating for her blade, the thin silver rapier had yet to be drawn.

As she exited the forest, she appeared to be brooding about something. That something was probably the dream she kept seeing these days which she never got to see the end of. The dream seemed to foretell something, but the girl did

not know what of.

France, Paris, night of the 6th day since Tu has entered France

“It’s finally over! Monseigneur Blum, it’s finally over! I feel like these few days have been crazy. Our esteemed majesty truly is energetic. But maybe it’s because I’m not young anymore.”

(TL: Original is 布鲁昂. The closest famous French guy that sounds like that is Andres Louis Blum, a 20th century French PM.)

Though there were still a number of details in the policies to be worked out, the discussions were over for now and the civil code, which was mostly based on the widely used French civil code, was now mostly done.

— Along with the civil code, 30 odd legal chapters and directives on how to improve the lives of civilians that covered themes from social cohesion to efficient methods to make bread...

And so, for every day before today, all legislative members of the Convention were locked up in the luxurious prison and debated from dawn till dusk; with their only respite being a short meal break late at night if the young king permitted it.

And in these short moments of rest, the famished legislators could only eat at a small restaurant beside the Palais. If the discussion did not end, those who weren’t debating would often fall asleep at the table.

Even the military officials who were allowed to go home, as Tu had already implemented the military reforms, could not relax. The moment they reached home, they would find letters signed by the king that contained instructions and required a reply by the next day.

“Perhaps it is indeed his majesty’s youth at work. But Monseigneur Tronchet, I feel that it is a good thing for France. Our king is truly worthy of our respect, a respect that comes from deep within unlike that of the previous Sun King.”

(TL: Francois Denis Tronchet was a jurist at the turn of the 18th century.)

(TL: The Sun King is Louis XIV, who ruled at the turn of the 17th century. Stitched up timelines, it seems.)

“Haha, Monseigneur Blum, you wouldn’t be referring that unique analytical ability and view of the law of his majesty, would you? Seems like our king likes to ask questions like ‘is this fair?’ or ‘is this practical?’ Quite unlike the Sun King.”

The white haired Tronchet said with a smile as he ate. Tu was the sort who respected his elders, and this extended to the so-called NPCs, which bolstered the admiration they had for him.

“His majesty is always ahead of everything. Hai... The things he has done these few days feels like they are more than what his father achieved in his entire lifetime...”

The young king worked tirelessly for 18 hours a day, and was quick and efficient to boot. Though the Prime Minister did indeed work as hard to help shoulder the burden, it felt like the king who had completed the military reforms in a short time had to deal with a lot more than the Prime Minister.

The young king had called this “cramming” which the original inhabitants could not understand at all. They only admired that figure of his that soldiered on no matter what and were unknowingly infected by his zeal.

(TL: Original term was 刷题, which has no translation. It’s a Chinese term that refers to doing loads and loads of practice exams.)

The gargantuan state apparatus was on the brink of collapse and stagnation but now, it was slowly moving in the right direction once more.

“Looks like we’ll have to work hard to so that we don’t lose to his majesty.”

“Haha, the old horse still dreams of galloping in the distant plains huh? haha.”

Austro-Hungary Empire, Vienna, Freud’s private clinic

(TL: Yes, that very Freud.)

“My lady, this condition you are in is a result of stress from too much impatience. Just wait patiently and that man will appear before you. A black haired young man... What a strange dream.”

“Is that so Mr Freud...”

In this clinic that appeared decades before it was supposed to, the golden

haired young girl was currently consulting the famous psychologist on the recurring dream she was seeing about the black haired young man who reached out to her.

She had heard that this clinic was very accurate in its analyses of dreams and she came eager to get to the bottom of a conundrum that had been dogging her for a while now. But all she got was an ambiguous answer which only strengthened her desire to know about the young man and why she was seeing him in her dreams.

- That young man who appears in my mind, what sort of person is he...
- Would I, really be able to meet him?

Chapter 6: We're fighting a war before we haven't gotten to know the palace maids yet?!

TL: More set-up but looks like the last one before we get some real action.

France, Paris, Palais des Tuileries

It has been about 3 weeks since the game launched and now the server was stuffed to its limits. There were supposedly 100 million players online at any one time with a few million in France alone. Everyone was doing their own things, enjoying their "second life".

Under the governance of Tu and his Prime Minister namesake, with the assistance of the new aristocracy they put in place in the upper and lower houses of parliament and the various state departments, France was able to begin the industrial revolution ahead of Great Britain which was still embroiled in civil war.

(TL: Imagine having to play Civ or Universalis manually... With no interface... *Shudder...*)

The tax authority was quickly set up to ensure a steady flow of revenues to finance the government, after which the Banque de France was also set up, along with other state agencies that would handle customs administration, land management as well as forestry.

Commerce was revived and the stock exchange was restored. Along with a devaluation, speculative activity was closely monitored for... Everyone admired the young king's quick moves which always seemed ahead of everyone but this was because he had the experience of ruling Prussia in the closed beta after all.

He would not spend as freely as the previous kings either. Rather, he scrimped and saved as much as he could on his personal expenses in the palace. This was heavily reported on by the public watchdog which had its restrictions lifted recently.

The set-up of the King's Guard, and other special units was proceeding

smoothly. With the recruitment of brilliant generals such as Ney, (Emmanuel de) Grouchy, (Jean) Lannes, (Laurent de Gouvion) Saint-Cyr, and Murat, the army in Paris now numbered up to 20,000 with an artillery that was among the best in Europe in both numbers and quality.

— This was something that Tu was proud of. When he was in Prussia, he had focused on developing the light infantry. Now that he was in a new place, he could try something new.

“Eh... Country ranks... France... 19th.”

The country ranks were determined by the system based on a complex scoring mechanism that rated each country on a variety of metrics. It would update every few days and each country would use this as a guide to formulating policies, alliances and even wars.

But it was rumoured that this system would be inaccessible soon, so Tu was now quickly jotting down everything he saw to aid his further plans.

“Looks like a lot of places have begun fighting... North England and Scotland, draw... Well, that’s within expectations.”

Tu sipped his drink as he read the battle logs.

The map and political situation here differed somewhat from the real world. The infamous “Europe Shit Stirrer” is currently in a state of civil war and division while Italy which consisted of many small countries then, did not exist entirely...

(TL: I don’t know why, but the UK is known as the Europe Shit Stirrer in China and this isn’t just because they want to leave the EU. You can see it for yourself, just Google or Baidu 欧洲搅屎棍.)

(TL: Pretty fair to divide UK in my opinion. I can imagine someone just trying to turtle there and then 63,528 turns later they drop a nuke on continental Europe.)

And because of the cooperation between players, many different countries sprang out of nowhere, such as the neighbouring Austro-Hungarian Empire which was the result of Vienna’s Francis’s maneuvering...

— According to the game designers, this freedom and mixed starting scenarios

were for the sake of not letting players gain an unfair advantage by choosing certain countries. That was indeed a good reason and irrefutable.

Let's continue seeing the battle logs...

"Un, Prussia and the Austro-Hungarian Empire... Haa? Prussia won?!"

— He nearly sprayed out his drink.

But Tu really was surprised. The Austro-Hungarian Empire was ranked 5th and though they weren't many, the country's specialist unit, the riflemen, were the natural counter to Prussia's light infantry.

Riflemen could easily clear out the light infantry with the support of line infantry after all, especially when rifles were not all too accurate in this era.

I wonder who is that new guy who stole my Prussia. Back in the closed beta, I'd spent hours poring over light infantry tactics and even then I still had a hard time in fights like these where there was a natural tactical disadvantage. Only after trial and error was I able to figure out a way around this.

"A war is happening nearby... The feudal lords in north-western France have begun skirmishing with enemies from the west? Do we have to move out as well?"

Tu hesitated as he pondered whether or not to move out and join them. He hadn't had a clear and concrete goal yet. Right now, other feudal lords in France were also eyeing Paris, and if they lost, his faction here would have a difficult time.

(TL: France is not yet united, and I'm sure other players will snatch plots of land here and there if they didn't get to be king.)

— It was hard getting to 20,000 strong after all. If we lose, do we have to engage in guerilla warfare after that?

— Better to wait for a while more. Paris is not yet ready, if no one comes knocking...

"Your majesty, the Austro-Hungarian Empire has declared war on us!"

The retainer's frantic report instantly shattered Tu's hesitation.

Alright, since you're taking the trouble to come, then I won't hold back either!

"In that case, no need to hold back!"

Tu pushed aside the stack of battle logs and downed the glass of red wine,

"Notify the generals to meet at the Ministry of Defence at once!"

Austro-Hungarian Empire, Vienna

The golden hall of the palace was filled with people ready to sortie. It was merely a skirmish to test the strength of their opponent so Francis, the Emperor of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, was not leading the troops himself this time. The one who would be leading, was the eye catching golden haired girl amongst the 10.

"Dawn, are you ready? This one is going to be an actual battle."

(TL: Translating this name because I don't think she is Chinese.)

Francis said leisurely as he looked at the girl.

"Your majesty need not remind me, I will accomplish my task set out before me."

Black socks embroidered with the edelweiss covered her long, slender legs. The gloves on her arms and the insignia on her chest held the same pattern. Her silver plate armour had extreme curves to contain her full breasts and by her waist hung a silver rapier which she inherited from her father.

With her honey coloured waist length hair, along with her exquisite looks and full breasts, no one would think that she was in the prime of her teenage years.

Her white unblemished skin seemed out of place on the battlefield, and she looked like she should be in a gorgeous night gown and dancing at balls instead of being ready for slaughter on the battlefield in her khaki military uniform and her cavalry armour.

"Dawn, are you really going to be leading this one?"

Another young officer beside seemed to want to stop the girl's decision but she only looked at him coldly.

"At least I wasn't defeated by the Prussians..."

“You...!”

The man was about to lose his temper but he held it in as Dawn was right. Amongst the 10 gathered here to lead the offensive on France, a few were involved in the Prussian battle that they had lost. The Emperor had allowed them to join this expedition, where they had a significant numerical advantage, to allow them to make up for their failure against Prussia.

— The upcoming opponent was, after all, a country that ranked more than 10 spots lower, and Francis did not take them too seriously.

“For your families, for the Great Austro-Hungarian Empire, seize the glory that lies ahead!”

Francis’s words were short, but they cut to the point and struck a chord with all the generals present.

— Humans are strange creatures that will go through tremendous pain, suffering and hardship in order to satiate their thirst for honour and victory.

“As your majesty wills, we will add another glorious chapter to the illustrious history of the Austro-Hungarian Empire!” All 10 said in one voice as they placed their hands on their right chest, the golden rays of the sun reflecting off the golden threads that formed the royal insignia on their uniforms.

“Move out!”

Paris, Defence Ministry Meeting Room

A tense atmosphere that enveloped this place that was covered with maps. Everyone here knew that this battle was more important than attaining personal glory, and would decide the future of the greater France.

When Tu made the decision to be the king of France, he knew what it entailed and had predicted a difficult situation like this would come eventually.

If his faction were to lose this battle, a number of feudal lords would definitely secede from France and join other countries.

Between following the impotent French royal regime or joining, say, the much more powerful Austro-Hungarian Empire, most feudal lords would definitely choose the latter. If that day would come, then France’s demise would definitely

be imminent.

Worse still, there was information that the southern districts are awaiting for an opportunity to secede from officials loyal to Paris. Prussia was not a docile neighbour either.

Unlike France, even if Vienna's Francis lost this battle, he still had the support of Budapest's Karl. These 2 were good friends who had fought side by side in the closed beta and had seized the opportunity of the closed beta player benefits to form the Austro-Hungarian Empire which should not exist.

(TL: Karl and Francis or Franz are common first/middle names in Austrian and Austro-Hungarian Emperor names so it's hard to say who they are using for inspiration.)

— In other words, this outcome of this battle is inconsequential to them, while it concerns the life and death of France.

“Damn it... How can those feudal lords be so selfish? Why are feudal lords in other countries so united against invaders?!”

Grouchy, an honest, upright man couldn't contain his anger anymore and slammed his fist down onto the meeting table in anger.

“They're just united on paper, and the situation in other countries is probably about the same as us. Spare the table, will you?”

Lannes flicked the fist that Grouchy had slammed down onto the map on the table. They stared at each other for a moment before the tension slowly dissipated.

But the fundamental problem was unresolved and Tu was not drawing on the map non-stop. Since the closed beta until now, Tu had never felt a rush quite like today.

Challenges are not scary. Some crave challenges because they can feel the urge to fight and enjoy the rush that comes from fighting against the odds.

— Wasn't this the very reason that Tu chose France?

Innumerable possibilities flashed past Tu and he revised the plan for attack over and over. Of the various considerations he had to keep on mind, the most

critical was that he could not let the Austro-Hungarian army gather together in one place as it would be difficult to overcome the vast disparity in numbers.

— Some variation of divide and conquer has to be used. It's a classic that is tried and tested and is suited for a wide variety of situations after all.

— But saying it is easy. I'm not the one controlling the Austro-Hungarian army so how do I divide them?

"The Massif Central..."

Tu had written all over the map so much so that it was almost covered by the black ink, when all of a sudden he stopped writing.

— Isn't the nail here?

"Move out! We must be faster than the enemy!"

Chapter 7: Oi, the one in front, we're fighting a war here, be serious!

Before the battle of Aude, on the way to Aude, the French side

All theories before the battle were only theories, and the most concrete decisions can only be made on the battlefield itself.

“Warriors! March quick and let us make for the battlefield as quick as we can!” Tu rushed the marching troops as he thought about what might happen in the upcoming battle.

This was an expansive area called Aude. To the west was a river that flowed from south toward the north, and to the east was another river that flowed from east to west. These 2 rivers intersected to form marshes and several lakes which could serve as a natural barrier for battles,

In the center of these lakes and rivers was a triangular area with an elevated plateau in the center, forming a highland area, and this highland area was the only passageway through the marshes.

— In any case, no matter how you look at it, the Massif Central is a critical position. Just like the Pratzen Heights in the Battle of Austerlitz, it is very likely that positioning and proper usage of the surrounding geography will be the decisive factor in this upcoming battle.

The inspired troops fast marched toward their destination, as their king had told them, that victory was built upon their own 2 feet.

“Victory will be ours! Let us teach a lesson to the Austro-Hungarians who do not know their place!” Ney’s words ignited the flame in the troops’ hearts while having the king himself personally lead the army greatly increased morale.

“Long live France! Long live France! Long live the king!!” The troops were cheering excitedly, as though victory had already come.

“Your majesty... I’m still a little worried. Your majesty need not personally come out on to the battlefield right...” Ney rode up to Tu and whispered in his ear.

— That's right, we are, after all, at a numerical disadvantage. A 10,000 man disadvantage. And if Ney doesn't believe in his majesty's sword skills and comes for my head instead, things will get a lot more troublesome.

In battles, the power of having a numerical advantage means that the amount of troops at your disposal is more and one can increase the troops on one's side at a critical time or just plainly using them to increase pressure on the enemy.

— On this point, numerical advantage is definitely not something to scoff at.

But what decides victory is not just numbers, but also the quality of the troops and morale. Most important of all is the commander's judgement. There are many examples of battles where the victors were able to overcome a numerical disadvantage, and this gave Tu a fair bit of confidence.

— I used to destroy my enemies as Prussia using superior mobility to overcome the problem of numbers after all.

But again, if the enemy were to stick together and hold their position, then it would be a battle of attrition. In that case, there would be no way to defeat a 30,000 strong force with 20,000.

Though these were his thoughts, Tu still smiled to allay Ney's concerns. "If that's what you think, then so is the enemy. Don't worry, just let out all your fury onto the enemies when the time comes!"

"Un... Alright, your majesty." Ney could only smile awkwardly as his thoughts were seen through. He could not read the young king's intentions at all, just like the slap when they suppressed the rebellion... It was like that then, and it's still the same even now. "I worried too much, your majesty should be fine."

Though he looked young and sometimes silly, this youth always felt strangely reliable, and that was the very reason why Ney chose to follow him.

And from the recent policies and reforms, this youth, who was both resolute and effective, was definitely capable and someone he could follow. His mercilessness when he was arresting and judging the corrupt officers was something unbelievable to Ney.

— Hai, since I already made my choice, I just have to do my best...

Ney tossed his thoughts aside. Though he was still worried, the main stickler was that the young king was still inexperienced and as a someone who had been through many battles, he believed that he knew better than the youth.

— But he did not know, that this youth was once the monarch who brought about miracles when he led Prussia.

“Eh, have you all heard? I heard that the other side has a female general.” Lannes said with a frivolous look on his rather handsome face, and shattered the previous awkward atmosphere.

“Why have you come out here, don’t you need to mind your cannons?” Ney, who still wore an awkward expression said.

— Female general...

When Tu heard this, a chill ran down his spine. There was no proof for it, but since that guy had come up here to say as much, he was probably going to try and link that female general with Tu, who still had no queen.

— Though I don’t really mind being made fun of by them, I still don’t want it to happen. This was a game after all and I want to enjoy my time here...

“The artillery is in the rearguard, your majesty. But never mind that, do you all know?”

Lannes was adamant on continuing this topic. Because this was their first battle, no one was sure of anything as most of their information was based on hearsay.

This Jean Lannes who was following beside should be a player. Tu felt it was weird that these fellows seemed to like using the names of famous generals but from their casual manner of speech, they shouldn’t be NPCs created in their image.

— I only know these famous generals from seeing their portraits thought so who knows? Maybe the real ones act like this as well?

“A... Woman?!”

“That’s right, this is my most most most concrete information.” As Lannes repeated these words, his short greyish silver hair seemed to shake in

satisfaction.

“It’s the commanding officer for the Austro-Hungarian army that’s coming this time. Seems like she is about 17 or 18 years of age and I heard she was from the closed beta and always led the cavalry shock troops.”

Supposedly, the original inhabitants were used to calling the closed beta period as the closed beta period. Seems like they think that it is a game by the gods. Tu could only laugh at such a convenient understanding.

— But this did make it easier to communicate. At least the players need not worry about making the original inhabitants suspicious when talking about the world as a game. I must say, the game designers are really meticulous huh.

“Someone from the closed beta? Your majesty, do you know her?”

— The same age as me huh...

— Wrong wrong, what am I thinking, this is war, I should be more serious.

Though Lannes said she was a closed beta player, he had never heard of such a person before when he led Prussia so he felt that it would definitely be interesting when they meet on the battlefield,

But now they know nothing about her. The report from the information bureau only mentioned that there was a female general but this can’t be helped as the information bureau was newly set up and the information networks are probably not in place yet.

Tu, whose head was filled with slender legs in black socks, felt a strong curiosity towards this unknown enemy. He never thought that he would find something interesting on the battlefield apart from battle itself. Perhaps it could be one of those war princesses that appear in books.

— Oh right, this game is pretty realistic so there won’t be any war princesses with cheat abilities. I just hope she looks decent when we meet, and isn’t fully covered from head to toe in plate armour like a tin can.

“What is her name?”

“Seems like it’s Dawn but this is just hearsay. I also heard that she is a ravishing beauty and even jewels paled in comparison to her beauty.”

“Sir Lannes, bragging a little here and there in front of me is one thing, but how can you brag so audaciously in front of his majesty? How beautiful can a female general be? Stop your delusions already.” Saint-Cyr interjected mercilessly just as Lannes was getting to a good part.

“She belongs to the cavalry, take care not to be too mesmerised when you engage her or you will be killed before you know it.” Lannes said, not too happy at being interrupted by Saint-Cyr.

“Hahaha... Don’t joke around, when the time comes his majesty will definitely order us to capture her alive.” Saint-Cyr laughed as the wind blew his dark red hair and scarlet cape.

“That will have to depend on you lot. When you see her in the flesh, you must tell me about her.”

The youth couldn’t hold back and interjected with one sentence. He had been trying to maintain his silence and keep up a majestic presence but since everyone else around him was chatting, how could he not join in.

“Do all young men get excited when they hear about beautiful women? Your majesty still lacks a queen right? Un?”

Tu only smiled in response and turned his head around, “We’re here... Go and prepare as we have planned.”

A sly smile appeared on the youth’s face.

Before the battle of Aude, the Austro-Hungarian side

About 30,000 or so marched off from Vienna with much fanfare as they dragged their gargantuan amount of supplies along.

The dust from the marching troops threatened to engulf the flags that were flying high every step and the sounds of bugles and horse footfalls made the contingent ever more imposing.

Though the Royal Guard from Vienna did not sortie, a sizeable amount of troops was gathered. Even though it was just a battle to test France’s strength, Francis did not intend on giving them an easy time either.

The Austro-Hungarian generals gathered together on horseback and began

chatting in a small circle.

“I heard that the enemy’s king is leading the battle himself. This one should be tough.”

“Earl Charles, you are thinking too much. Even if the enemy’s king did come, our overwhelming numerical advantage of about 10,000 or so will render them powerless.”

“Anyone with a little bit of common sense will know that we just need continue advancing westward with our troops. Can those weaklings even stop us?”

Such flippant, arrogant words showed the contempt they had towards the French army.

“Probably not, but I still feel uneasy.”

“Earl Charles, please remember where you stand. Our primary mission is to ensure our troops from the northern regions return home safely, and not how to help fight a war for those fellows from Vienna. I don’t know what you’re thinking about but it’s best you leave it behind.”

— Probably an after effect from when the Prussians ambushed us. Forget it, I’m probably thinking too much.

— In any case we’re here only for the gold from the royal army. No matter what the bulk of the honours will be snatched away by them anyway in the end.

— I really don’t know what the Duke is thinking. When we were fighting the Prussians, I don’t recall Vienna sending any reinforcements!

— Never mind, no point thinking further. I’ll deal with things as they come...

Earl Charles shook his head as he tried to clear those bad memories from his head.

“All troops on alert, we have reached the battlefield.”

The golden haired girl riding at the front was the one who gave the order. At long last, they finally reached the battlefield. She was going to relax but after hearing the report from the cavalry scout, her face that had just begun to loosen immediately tightened into an anxious expression.

“Report, Lady Dawn, those Frenchies have arrived!”

Chapter 8: I suspect you're an artillery fanatic...

Aude, French side

"You must bear this in mind, the Massif Central is of critical importance!"

Tu was familiar with the topography of this place from his closed beta days. He knows full well that if he is to create a miracle from the despairing disparity in numbers, he has to use the highlands well.

Just then, Tu felt a slight piercing pain in his hand. He raised his hand and saw that there were several red lines on the back of his right hand that formed 2 dragons

This was probably the "King's Privilege" though if this attack was just to test the waters, then he cannot use it.

"Remember, covering fire must be done in a timely fashion when the tides of battle are favourable. I leave the judgement to you."

"I hear and obey, your majesty."

Tu looked at the back of his hand once more before putting it down as Lannes accepted his order seriously.

The smiling youth was gone. Right now, the king was serious and cool, which made Lannes get his act together as well, as he had chosen to follow him after all and was eager to be a part of his first victory.

"Grouchy, you lot come here."

Tu whispered to the generals who came over in their ears to re-confirm the strategy for the coming battle.

Night slowly came, and the Austro-Hungarian army finally made its way to the battlefield after taking its time.

Because the army for this expedition was formed by 2 main organisations in Vienna and the inner northern areas, the 30,000 strong army was divided in 2. 20,000 from the troops under the royal family's direct command and 10,000

from the northern army. These 2 groups made their way to Aude separately, with the intention of gathering there.

Because of the topography of Aude, this army did not have much artillery firepower, and comprised mainly of line infantry with the prized riflemen in the rear guard.

The riflemen were armed with the rifles which were currently the most accurate weapon in the world, though the numbers were few as there were only 20,000 or so of these riflemen amongst several thousand feudal lords in the entirety of Austria.

— As expected, because the riflemen are their trump card, the feudal lords were terribly unwilling to send them out even if it was the Emperor himself who was gathering troops and so only 500 or so were sent out in this 30,000 strong army. With such numbers, they can largely be ignored.

Before the Austro-Hungarian army arrives, Tu decided to take a bet after hearing the scout's report.

— My plan has no issues. If anything, the Austro-Hungarian side has overestimated itself and granted me a grand opportunity which I won't let go of.

He pointed to the highland and once more recited the battle plans.

“Apart from the Imperial Guard, all other battalions are to move into a defensive formation roughly 10km away from here on the right wing of the highlands. The first defensive line will comprise of Lannes's 4th battalion less the artillery, Murat's 2nd battalion and a portion of Saint-Cyr's battalion.”

“At an appropriate distance behind them will be the second defensive line. There, Saint-Cyr's cavalry will lie in wait, and finally Grouchy's 3rd battalion will form the third defensive line and be ready to provide reinforcements when needed.”

“On the left wing of the highlands, Ney's 1st battalion will be in charge of luring the enemy on the left wing to climb the highlands.”

“I will lead the Imperial Guard to re-take the highlands just as the Austro-Hungarian army takes them!”

This long series of orders were overwhelming, and came from a young man not older than 18, making one feel terribly unnatural.

— Was this a maturity beyond one's age?

“Ney, your mission is especially important. You must imagine yourself as a matador and lure the enemy to you with a red cloth but you must also take care that they do not run you down!”

“Please don't worry your majesty!”

Ney's fighting spirit was lit up by the excitement of fighting a battle with the odds stacked against him.

Though Ney's task seemed to be the hardest, Tu understood full well that the crux of this plan lay in the step that involved retaking the highlands, which was the completing step to dividing the Austro-Hungarian army.

If his troops which were supposed to retake the highlands were defeated then the plan would be finished there and then. When that time comes, he would definitely meet his end, so he decided to be the one to personally lead the most elite of the soldiers for this.

The preparations were now complete, and what was left was to unleash it onto the Austro-Hungarian army!

The Austro-Hungarian army on the right was nearing Murat.

As the distance narrowed to a musket's firing range, Murat drew the sword by his waist as his warhorse neighed.

He could feel an unusual power fill him, and he seemed to be brimming with desire for battle.

“Are you afraid?”

The words which the young king had posed to him before the battle floated up in his mind. Back then, he hadn't answered.

“Of course I'm afraid, your majesty.”

Murat's face cracked into a smile as he found the answer, upon which his battlelust grew even greater.

“I’m afraid I might kill too many and your majesty can’t reward me enough.”

Murat looked up and laughed.

Even though the army before him outnumbered his own several times over.

“Fire!”

Countless bullets shot out following Murat’s roar.

The other side yelled out too, and the bulk of the light infantry hastened their charge under the covering fire of a portion of the line infantry. Thunderous roars and the sounds of slaughter resounded through the highlands.

“Adjust the gun positions, targeting the right wing of the highlands and begin bombardment.”

Lannes who had been hiding in the back had also begun artillery support.

With the roar of a hundred howitzers, shells began raining down onto the Austro-Hungarian army. This was the artillery that Tu painstakingly formed and now was the time to reap the rewards of his hard work.

— It can be difficult sometimes to tell whether this is a game or reality. These howitzers were after all, some years ahead of their time, yet took just a few weeks to be manufactured.

The Austro-Hungarian army was beaten back by this sudden volley and their attack weakened by quickly regained strength.

“Long live the Empire!”

The dull and continuous cannonfire shook the earth as the Royal Army on the right had begun engaging the enemy.

The cannonfire seemed to draw closer by the minute. Looks like it will be a close struggle and the cannons will likely be the decisive factor. I must defeat this lone battalion on the left, get up on the highlands and then move to assist the right side.

“You think you can stop the Northern Troops with just this few?! Charge!”

The comrade to his side roared out the troops began their charge at the enemy.

The enemy returned fire sporadically as they retreated and seemed like they had no intention of stopping us from taking the highlands, or perhaps they are luring us in.

— Could it be a trap?

No, no, the enemy must be giving up. That's right, our side has so many, they can't possibly hold us off with so few on their side!

Besides, even if he voices this concern of his, he would only be seen as a coward as he couldn't imagine anyone believing him under such favourable circumstances as everyone else was just thinking about how they could rack up more achievements.

Earl Charles hid what seemed like ludicrous thoughts to himself, and joined the charge.

“Don't let them escape!”

“Capture the king alive!”

The enemy continued to retreat while the Northern Troops advanced onto the highlands.

The Northern Troops poured out onto the highlands, drunk from their seemingly imminent victory as they chased the retreating French troops in the hopes of reward, completely forgetting their comrades on the right who were stymied by artillery bombardment.

— This was truly a chaotic charge for the entire battalion had become a snake that was frantically slithering for the French troops on the right.

“You lot from Vienna, us brave warriors from the north will be coming to save you soon!”

The general leading at the front shouted this out with great fervor but soon, a heavy punch would knock the daylight out of him.

The enemy that had been retreating up till now had begun firing back at full power after they reformed their formation and...

— Another battalion has joined in?!

“The enemy on the right has...!”

The flag bearer in the centre of the troops suddenly realised that a flag with a never-before-seen coat of arms consisting of an eagle with a dragon motif before a single arrow went through his head. Within moments after this arrow flew out, a new warcry drowned out every other sound before and the army was split in 2.

— Cries of slaughter rumbled.

Murat had begun engaging the enemy and Ney had successfully lured the enemy onto the highlands. Everything went according to his plan and now was the time to launch a counteroffensive.

Tu drew the bow from his back and slung on his quiver.

As long as it was still the era of muskets, arrows still had their use. Besides, his archery has taken him through countless battlefields and all those who'd laughed at him and his bow had all fallen without exception.

Using the darkening evening sky and the shadows cast by the highlands as cover, Tu led his Imperial Guard toward the dreaming enemy. This was the moment he had been waiting and scheming for.

— Time for them to see the true strength of France.

The cannonfire and slaughter on the left had masked the footsteps of the Imperial Guard and they had arrived before the highlands virtually undetected. Right now, they could hear the curses of the enemy that took over the excited shouts of the initial charge as Ney's battalion began firing back at their full power.

“Break them!”

— Grouchy's battalion had probably entered the battlefield.

“Our blades will draw the blood of all who oppose us!”

“Follow your liege and welcome victory, brave warriors!”

Tu smiled at the soldiers behind him as the Imperial Guard unsheathed their swords while Tu pulled out 2 arrows.

“For France!”

“Charge!!!”

The flag of France rose tall and proud and the air rumbled as the troops charged out onto the highlands with their swords drawn.

— Those who use guns are cowards, the Imperial Guard never uses guns!

Hearing an unusual tremors from the plains on the right, the flag bearer of the Austro-Hungarian Northern Troops finally detected Tu and the Imperial Guard.

But, it was all too late.

“The enemy has appeared on the...!”

As the arrow whizzed through the air and met its target, the flag bearer fell before he could finish his warning.

The sky darkened while the artillery continued its bombardment unabated. Tu used a fire to spot the enemy and let loose his arrows as the Imperial Guard charged into the enemy and divided them in 2.

“Enemies! Frenchies we haven’t seen before!”

“Ah! They’re charging at us!”

The Austro-Hungarian army descended into chaos as they awoke from their premature victorious fever and met with the nightmare they found themselves in. A number of troops had begun running away from the other side of the highlands as fear began to take hold in their minds.

The scales began tipping in favour of France.

Chapter 9: Are you happy to see me, beautiful?

The battle of Aude

Boom! Boom! The battle on the right side raged.

From the moment the battle began, cannonfire had never ceased. Along with the thunderous charge of cavalry up front and the sounds of slaughter all over the battlefield, tremors permeated Aude.

The commanding officers on both sides were getting impatient. Saint-Cyr had gathered all the remaining cavalry and was ready to do a final charge to the death as he got on another warhorse. As reckless as he was, he had gone through so many horses that he had long since lost count.

Thousands of armoured and unarmoured cavalry soon joined the desperate and chaotic battle.

“Charge! For the Empire!” Dawn led her light cavalry as the Austro-Hungarian royal army’s attacks intensified as they soon realised it had become a battle to the death.

Because the majority of Dawn’s troops were light cavalry, she had been placed in the rearguard and only charged forth when things were exceedingly dire, which was now!

Her rapier danced about as she rode through the battlefield, her long golden hair swaying in the wind, as she slaughtered her enemies left and right.

Be it her elegant figure on the horse, or her dazzling display of swordsmanship, both were impressive enough to make one stop short and sigh in admiration.

Though her forces had ruined the enemy’s formation and broken through the first few defensive lines, it had come at the cost of most of her light cavalry.

Dawn was increasingly anxious as it seemed as though no matter how many enemies she cut down, the Austro-Hungarian army that had the numerical advantage was being brought to its knees.

Just then, she saw a single flag flying on the highlands, which was probably the

fountain of bravery for the Frenchies.

— An eagle with a dragon motif...!

— The enemy's king is on the highlands!

"Follow me! Capture the enemy's king alive!" Dawn immediately steered her horse in that direction and led her remaining cavalry as she broke through the remaining defensive lines and swept past the deserting and scattered Austro-Hungarian northern troops.

I will be the one to decide how this battle ends!

The battle on the highlands had already concluded. The enemy's morale was utterly gone as only the most ardent warriors were still fighting. They could not change the course of the battle, and things had gone almost exactly as Tu had planned. Just as when he was leading Prussia, he knew that the morale and loyalty of the Austro-Hungarian northern troops was nothing much to write home about.

— How could an army have high morale if it does not have conviction?

After the enemy on the left was destroyed, Tu ordered the majority of his Guard to charge down toward the right while he kept watch on the highlands with a small portion of his troops. This was out of Tu's usual prudence as he was wary of any 'what-ifs.'

— Have we won...?

— All I need to is wait...

— Is that really the case...?

Just then, Tu saw a cavalry battalion charging in his direction with a girl who had a head of dazzling golden hair leading at the front.

— These cavalry, they are Austro-Hungarian forces, how did they get all the way up here?!

"Capture the enemy king!"

"Get into formation, fire!"

The few troops left on the highlands had begun to stop the advance of the

enemy. Tu had run out of arrows and he shouldered his bow before putting his hand on his shortsword at his waist. It was his sabre, and the symbol of the king of France.

The short sword shone with an unusually radiant white light that was exceptionally eye-catching in the pitch black night.

Along with the roar of cannons and muskets, the cavalry led by the girl diminished in number but their pace quickened further and before the troops at hand could form up a proper defensive line, the cavalry had charged into the heart of Tu's forces.

— The ones who made it before me numbered a dozen or so, and wielded bright swords as they yelled. All my nearby platoons are engaged in battle and can't be counted for assistance.

— What do I do? Does god insist on having me play this game like Dynasty Warriors?

Though my swordsmanship is not as good as my marksmanship, it should still be sufficient to face the girl and her cavalry. Though that said, the risk is far too great. Even though this is a game, it's so realistic.

I have to commend this girl though, she is truly excellent, be it with her swordsmanship or judgement on the battlefield. Indeed, if she can capture France's king, the scales would once again tip in the favour of the Austro-Hungarian side. If I were on their side, that's what I would do as well.

Well then, I must definitely have this excellent female general. I will definitely receive Francis's 'newbie grab bag' with gratitude!

— Young lady, your thinking is right, unfortunately...

"Surrender, King of France." The girl commanded as she pointed her rapier at Tu slightly hesitantly as she had no intention of slicing his neck.

— Unfortunately you don't know I still have Lannes.

"Haa!" Along with a shout to distract the Austro-Hungarians, Tu drew the shortsword forcefully and pointed it at the heavens so that Lannes who was at the lower ground could notice it. All around Tu were mountains of corpses,

mostly belonging to the northern Austro-Hungarians who had died in the chaos created by Tu.

— The thick smell of blood reminded the young man.

He had assigned Lannes to the artillery not on a whim, but because Lannes's judgement on the battlefield was top notch amongst all the officers under his command. Moreover, the cannons Lannes had could fire at oblique angles.

— I'll let you taste what a real cannon is like!

Boom! Boom! The projectiles that flew out accurately landed at the back of the cavalry and blasted them apart.

Without any hesitation at all, Tu had dove into a mountain of corpses nearby to shield himself from the blast.

After this wave of cannonfire, the battle should end shortly after. France's victory was already set in stone and after all that has happened, the Austro-Hungarian army has all but collapsed...

Tu crawled out of the mountain of corpses and brushed his epaulets. Just as he was about to descend the highlands, he saw the girl from before.

She seemed to be shell-shocked and lay on the ground. Her eyes were slightly closed and her pupils that were slightly dyed in red seemed to be slowly returning to their original pure ocean blue.

— To think she wasn't knocked out from a point blank blast. This should be protection from the game for players. Something like they won't die as long as it's not a direct hit...

— This was perfect, if only she wasn't an enemy...

Tu pointed the shortsword at her, but then sheathed it back after a moment's pause.

He then reached out his hand which the girl quickly took with her small tender hands after some hesitation.

"Welcome to France, my fair lady..."

I managed to charge through. Though the French troops had tried to stop me,

they could only fall one by one to my blade.

These people weren't my opponent. Of those who tried to stop me back home, none of them were worthy opponents either. They were far too shallow and thought of myself as a mere vase, a decorative vase to accompany the glory of the Empire.

Perhaps those officials and generals became spiteful after being rejected by me...

The only reward I've been able to receive is an empty title and nothing else.

— Those generals who only want a beautiful woman for themselves know nothing! I'm clearly better than them many times over! All they know is to throw away their weapons and armour and run away while I'm the only one who can break through the enemy lines!

— But why was it like this in this rotten Empire? Why could these useless people soar solely on the back of their family's prestige? Why were those generals who knew naught but how to send their soldiers to death wastefully winning promotions time after time?

— On this point, that fearless king does seem to be a worthy opponent.

"How could that be..."

"Get into formation, fire!"

Dawn caught a clear glimpse of the king who was leading the troops from the cannonfire which lit up the night sky, and saw that he was a young man about her age with short, black hair and held a pitch black longbow in his hands.

Dawn did not dare believe what she saw and looked once more to confirm it.

It was still the young man with short, black hair, only now he had shouldered his black longbow.

— Why does the enemy king look exactly like the man from my dreams!

Though she was very surprised, Dawn did not believe that he was actually the one from her dreams. As yet another round of musket fire swept through her ranks, more cavalry fell to the ground as they let out death throes. Dawn's warhorse did not shrink at all when met with this and continued its charge.

“Charge!”

Leaving behind the infantry which tried to stop her, Dawn still had a dozen or so cavalry while the king only had his sabre...

— That king is now alone, he won't be able to defeat me!

“Surrender, King of France.”

The rapier was pointed right at the king, from which fresh blood which glistened on the blade. But the young man's countenance did not waver at all.

— What was he thinking?!

“Haa!” The young man drew his sabre at his waist and pointed it at the heavens.

A radiance white as snow came forth from the blade which lit up the pitch black night!

He said nothing more but Dawn felt a chill run down her spine. Even though there was only one enemy left, her ocean blue eyes were slowly being dyed blood red.

This was the signal for danger but Dawn did not know from where it would come from.

“Jump off your horses quick!”

Boom! Boom!

Cannonfire blasted through and shredded through the air. Immediately, the blast engulfed all cavalry troops around her.

Dawn was able to jump off in time but she was still shell-shocked from the blast and by the time she regained her senses, she saw that hand before her.

— The same hand as she saw in her dreams.

“Welcome to France, my fair lady...”

— Hadn't she been waiting for this man? The man who could defeat her?

Chapter 10: She's already here, and now you want her back?!

The battle of Aude which would decide the fate of the newly resurgent France ended in a great victory for Tu's Paris forces. 4,500 brilliant warriors were sacrificed in exchange for 23,000 casualties in the Austrian side (most of the damage was inflicted when the Austro-Hungarian side retreated), and 1 captive.

— But,

“My respected majesty, it truly is a cause for celebration that you could emerge triumphant from such unfavourable circumstances. I'm so moved that I cannot help but to write a poem to sing your praises but if you do not return Dawn, then I'm afraid your majesty will be treated to an inspection of my personal army in Paris.

— Karl”

After the end of a brilliant first battle, Tu received this challenge. As he sat in the office in the palace facing the giant fountain outside the window, Tu kept thinking.

He thought back to the time when the battle ended, as he pointed the sword at the bloodied face while long golden hair spread haphazardly across the white snow. At that moment, he felt like he was in a fantastical and dramatic scene from movies.

What a weird delusion, she's an enemy, and someone who only just a short while ago wanted his head. Why did he have this weird feeling, a warmth in his chest...

Tu shook his head and tried to keep his cool. He had to get rid of any stray thoughts. This was a battlefield and he could not afford to relax. Even when victory was in his grasp, he still could not allow himself to relax as he would not forget how the Soviet Union's Vatutin died.

But no matter how much he tried to remind himself, Tu was still very frantic then. This was very weird to him as he had been through a great deal in the

closed beta, yet why did his heart not stay calm then?

“Hu~~” Tu exhaled as he got up and looked out of the window.

A few butterflies flew in the flowers beside the fountain. The golden sunlight passed through the crystal clear water and reflected within the mist, creating a golden light show. This gave quite a bit of flavour to an ordinary scene, and—

— A golden haired young beauty.

— The girl who was now picking flowers in her uniform — Dawn.

The conflict between a relaxed environment and the dignified uniforms, or perhaps simply “gap moe”, made Tu’s heart thump again... Just like it did in their first meeting.

Tu turned around, and did his best not to let her affect his judgement.

Should he keep the woman or face the consequences of crossing swords with Karl? His army at present, was not able to sustain such losses.

— The things I have to consider are far too many. It’s easy for Karl, but troublesome for me.

Tu thought back to the time when they were returning to Paris. The other generals had very different reactions seeing him dismount from his warhorse as he led the captive and her horse toward his palace.

— Of course, I remember Grouchy’s helpless look, and Murat’s wry smile...

Though he hadn’t actually talked to her the entire way and though her expression was icy and she had a disdainful look on her the entire time, she was surprised when she saw the king led her horse...

Tu had detected it, but he didn’t speak, and only led her into the palace with a smile as he introduced her to this and that... Now that he is thinking about it, not throwing her in prison before negotiating with Austria was something very illogical.

— Too many illogical things have been happening since Dawn came into the palace.

When she first entered the palace, she kept wearing her uniform that was

caked in mud and blood. When night came, she slipped into the laundry room when there was a change of guard and placed her outer clothing in the pile of clothes which were to be washed. When she returned, the guards tried to stop her but she stared at them with bloodlust, and stopped them short, before returning to her room.

Though he had specifically instructed that she was to be treated well, and even specially picked more honest guards, he felt like this action of hers made him feel helpless about the situation.

— Or perhaps, interesting.

Pleasant recollections swept through him like a gentle breeze, making him feel very comfortable. Even though it was only yesterday, it felt like something that happened long ago.

He thought back to yesterday noon when he first spoke with her. The content was simple, and apart from the usual greetings, it was mostly him one-sidedly sharing his views.

Of course, these were all unimportant thoughts which would disappear not too long after even if he didn't talk about them...

Whether it was a courteous reply to him starting a conversation, or to break up his endless speech, she asked him a question— About the sword, the sword that shone with a radiant white light on the battlefield.

Then he hesitated but decided to tell her anyway. This was the special sword given to the French monarch— Joysword, a holy sword that could radiate different hues of light under different circumstances. Of course, this game wasn't some fantasy game and this sword was just a slightly sturdier ordinary sword that could emit light...

He stopped there and she did not ask further about the sword as she turned to look at the garden outside the window. He then switched the topic to the garden and tried to extricate her from the whirlpool of boredom he had thrown her into from his long political speeches which seemed to make her irritated.

Now, Tu turned toward the sword on the rack. He had hid one characteristic from her. The sword's light reflected the mood of the user, *e.g.* it would turn red

when the user was happy and white when calm *etc.*

Thus, one could determine what the commanding officer's next step would be and this was one way he himself had defeated France in the closed beta. Thus, this sword should only be drawn when absolutely necessary.

...

Tu's rationality stopped his boundless thoughts, and he looked at the gigantic map hung on the wall.

This was not the ordinary European map. Countries and borders were different. Britain was separated from continental Europe as usual but unlike in history where Britain was a powerful force and could easily mess up continental Europe, here it was divided into over 50 countries with no unifying organisation whatsoever.

Tu smiled as he thought about how George was still enduring and holding back in London and how his situation was worse than that of France.

But... France's situation was not too optimistic either. Though the victory at Aude had gained Tu the loyalty of the feudal lords surrounding Paris and shocked the south which was pro-Austrian, if France were to remain divided at a time when battle could come from anywhere, peril was still abound...

Looking at the map, to the west of France was a Western Union Kingdom ruled jointly by 2 monarchs, one man and one woman. As they were currently engaged in a battle for dominance over the high seas, they were currently friendly toward France and trade was flourishing with the feudal lords on the western front.

(TL: In case anyone forgets, Spain is to the west of France.)

Northern Britain was still experiencing secessions, and from time to time, small groups of pirates would arrive and attack the northern parts of France. But these thieves weren't enough to constitute a serious threat. The true threat for the northern feudal lords was Prussia— The country that Tu originally controlled.

Because of this, Tu knew what Prussia was up to and if he wasn't wrong, Prussia was currently busy engaging Austria in war and couldn't care less about their western border as Prussia had to decisively defeat Austria before it could move on to France.

— But what use is saying all this? The northern feudal lords won't even listen!

Chapter 11: Yaa, that was some good fanservice

“Austro-Hungary huh.” Tu sighed as he looked at the terrifyingly large problem on the map.

— The Austro-Hungarian Empire to the south was ruled jointly by Francis and Karl. They had given him a big headache in the closed beta but he never thought they would be in the exact same positions as they were before! And he, on the other hand, was now in the disorganised France.

The feudal lords there were more united and were deeply loyal to the royal family of Vienna. As long as it wasn't too unreasonable, Austria's feudal lords would always comply with the Emperor's orders. If anyone were to invade Vienna, the Austrian Emperor could easily call up an army that easily exceeded 130,000...

But now Austria had to defend against Prussia to the north, and after this recent defeat, Francis would be more cautious of moving against France again.

— But Karl was here and he had to figure out a way to deal with him with what Tu had at hand. His forces were stretched as though his artillery was practically intact, his cavalry had suffered great losses.

As Ney and the rest were the ones who did most of the fighting in Aude, the damage to his personal guard was not significant but in the next battle, they would have to be the main force.

Karl Ludwig, Archduke of Hungary. In the closed beta, he had led his much weaker personal army across the Thérain which separated Russia and Hungary and achieved a miraculous victory over the Russians which would eventually lead to him being the strongest of the 3 knights in Austro-Hungary. The insignia of the Hungarian troops was that of a sword, a perfect match with Austria's shield.

(TL: Thérain is a river in France, this is probably the jumbled up geography at work.)

Of the other 2 knights, 1 is someone whose name escapes me belonging to the northern troops and the last one is Dawn, who belongs to the Austrian royal

family's personal army.

But because of his erratic nature, he was known as the fatuous duke.

Archduke Karl was handsome and had a nose for decadence that made it seem like he was a Habsburg. He was excessively passionate about wine and beautiful women, and there were rumours that every time he returned to his encampment after cross the Thérain, his tent would be filled with the laughter of women.

There was also a rumour that Karl was born in a wealthy family and because of how he was brought up, he did not treat his generals equally and the only troops he could really command were those in his personal army. Though the feudal lords around Budapest were friendly with him, he could only count on them to protect Hungary.

— Thus, if he were to come all the way here, Tu had a decent chance of winning.

And if he should defeat Karl, his animosity with Austro-Hungary would be made known to all other players. As for her, she would probably...

She would probably hate him right? Would she forgive the him who has destroyed the chance for her to return home? If that was the case, then he needn't rush a decision on Karl.

"Ah, what the heck am I thinking about." Tu felt like his thoughts began to run wild like a galloping horse and he was now trying to rein himself in.

— Could it be... No way... I fell in love with her.

His face began turning red and his heartbeat noticeably quickened so much that the *dong dong* was becoming clearly audible.

"Damn it... What use is thinking about all this?" Defeating Karl was a necessary move as only then would the southern feudal lords give up on secession, thereby advancing his ambitions— In any case, to battle!

Since Karl had granted him this opportunity, he had to grasp it even though it might be a little too hasty. Even if he didn't agree to it, Karl would still come, and so rather than wait him to siege Paris, Tu could move the battlefield to the

borders and stop Karl from advancing into France.

And so, battle is necessary, but...

Tu felt a need to speak with the girl.

The rays from the setting sun shone on the flowered by the side of the cobbled streets, as well as Dawn's golden hair, which looked ever more radiant and beautiful. Indeed, the sight of a beautiful young girl picking flowers under a sunset sky is something that can fill the creative founts of poets.

But Tu had no mood for reciting poems and was occupied with the thought of how to open his mouth.

He knew to how to start a war but he didn't know how to start a conversation and he began to feel awkward as he stood behind Dawn.

Finally, Dawn couldn't put up with the stifling atmosphere and said first, "What business does your majesty have with a captive?"

"I believe you've probably guessed it." If she was someone he felt was worthy, then she should be brilliant enough to guess what was going on. Though this was what he thought, if she really didn't get it, then would he seriously mind that about her?

"Please use your own discretion to deal with the matter of Sir Karl, your majesty. I won't be woeful at Karl's loss nor will I be joyful at your majesty's victory. I have grown tired of the pathetic politics in Austria, that those with talent have to endure the jealousy of others, and of those who seek the company of others just for their looks."

She suddenly stopped talking, but Tu had heard what he wanted to, and felt like he had received a sudden windfall.

She's tired of Austria's politics, which means that she wouldn't mind staying in France; she won't be sad, which means her relationship with Karl isn't very good; she said 'to use your own discretion', which means that Tu doesn't need to hold back with Karl.

— This is as good as having meatballs falling from the sky.

(TL: Okay, I just had to leave this China-context joke in. The raw uses 天上掉馅

饼 which is the Chinese name for the movie “Cloudy with a chance of meatballs”.)

“Your majesty, I’m tired and will be retiring to my room.” Dawn then dusted the grass off her uniform, but did not clean off the pollen that stuck to her golden insignia, and then left casually, as though she had gradually set aside her reservations when she first came to the Palais des Tuileries...

“I will share... Your burden...” Dawn whispered words, that seemed like they could have been instinctual or of her intent, as she passed by him.

After returning to the princess’s room that the enemy king had prepared for her, as she faced the last golden rays from the setting sun, Dawn finally smiled—A refreshing smile that could melt the coldest of winters, her very first smile since coming back alive from near death in Aude.

— Share my burden huh?

— Interesting... Very interesting.

Tu was standing alone in the garden now, and was smiling in spite of himself, not knowing if it was from the coming battle which lit his spirits or if it was from the words of the girl just now which dispersed the fog of confusion in his heart.

— If I wield the holy sword now, I’ll probably find out.

— But, what light would it emit?

“Summon Ney and the rest. Tell them to come to the assembly hall in the Palais as soon as possible.” Tu issued an order to his personal attendant.

...

I will share, your burden...

Karl huh...

Chapter 12: How do we keep the girl?

TL: Anyone have any idea why this series is rated so poorly on NU? I mean, it's not that well-written (stupid third to first to third person POV) but the distribution of scores is more like that of an NTR series (which it isn't by the way).

Paris, assembly hall of the Palais des Tuileries

"Your majesty's plan is far too risky! I, Grouchy, will not agree to it!" Grouchy yelled out in fury as his temple vein bulged.

Tu stopped the pencil which he was using to scribble on the map and clenched his right fist in front of his mouth to suppress a reactionary outburst. He lightly sighed and placed his hand, and put down his pencil, "Share your views."

"Leaving aside the fact that there has never been a formation based primarily on artillery units, no matter how many we have, the gap between attacks is far too long. Between loading and unloading, the enemies will easily break through the fort and attack the artillery units with barely any infantry cover. When the time comes, it will become a one-sided slaughter! Our artillery troops were mainly recruited from the NCO military academies. Leaving aside the issue of replenishing NCOs in other units, even if we throw in our reserves, our artillery will meet their maker in Fort Carré! How will we defend France then without an artillery?!"

Tu was shocked at the sudden outpour by Grouchy who usually spoke little— Though it wasn't just Tu, as everyone else was stunned.

"Grouchy, I never knew you were so eloquent? When are you going to teach in the NCO academy, I'll definitely go to support you." Saint-Cyr made a snide remark, hoping to alleviate the tense atmosphere where it wouldn't be strange for anyone to draw swords in the next moment.

Tu lowered his head and looked at the map as he sank into deep thought. His pencil kept tapping at a single point on the map, the cardinal point— Which was also where the upcoming battle was about to take place, Fort Carré.

Fort Carré was originally the most important fort in the southern part of France. It was 2 days' journey away from Paris, and after the surrounding feudal lords pitched in and contributed resources to strengthening and expanding it, it was now a gigantic military complex that could hold a 20,000 strong army.

On the walls of the Fort were hundreds of crevices from which cannons were installed. The walls themselves were heavily reinforced such that the players in the vicinity always boasted that even a 100,000 men would not be able to take the Fort in a 100 years.

And because a river separated the Fort from most of France, the Fort was also known as the Lost Rock.

The southern French feudal lords have also signed a non-aggression pact with the Austrian Emperor which designates the area between Fort Carré and Burg Ockenfels as a special economic and free trade zone where no troops are to enter.

This pact was originally proposed by the Austrian Emperor so that he could concentrate his troops on the north against Prussia but later on, the French feudal lords in the south began pivoting towards Austria and this pact stayed on and became iron-clad.

— And now there are 20,000 heavily armed troops stationed at Burg Ockenfels.

When the Battle of Aude concluded, Fort Carré's feudal lords actually allowed the Austro-Hungarians to pass through in their retreat. Seems like they are serious on secession.

The situation couldn't be allowed to deteriorate further. If the Austro-Hungarian Empire were to occupy Fort Carré, then Francis would be able to gain a foothold into France and an advance base.

— Tu cannot let this thorn be stuck onto France's thigh!

And yet, at this urgent time, Tu had to waste precious time on arguing with his generals...

— I really can't...

If this goes on, then Karl will even have the luxury of time to compose poems

at Fort Carré's church hall!

Leaving aside whether what Grouchy said makes sense, even if his plan were to be executed smoothly, it would take at least 3 days for his troops to make it to Fort Carré.

By the time he received Karl's letter, Karl would probably have set off. What if Karl were able to reach Fort Carré before him? What would he do then?

... What to do, what to do...

How could he stop Karl, or perhaps stall his advance?

Will he repeat his mistakes in the closed beta? What to do... What to do!

...

Wait, perhaps there is an even better way. If they can't be stopped, then... We just have to prepare to siege them!

After a short moment, Tu smiled as he stopped the pencil in his hand.

"Grouchy, come over here..."

...

After Tu finished whispering in his ear, Grouchy's fury subsided and instead, the flames of hope burned in his eyes as he nodded still hesitantly, out of prudence.

Tu clapped his shoulders and smiled at him as he said confidently, "Go, I leave France's future to you."

At this, Grouchy finally set aside all his doubts and bowed, before hurrying out.

"Your majesty, it's time you shared your strategy in detail." Ney was impatient as the planning over these few days were tiresome to his combative nature. In his eyes was a hunger for battle and victory.

"Everyone's units have suffered significant losses in the last battle so Lannes's artillery and my personal guard will be the main force. The upcoming battle will also be a siege battle, and so cavalry will not be participating."

"But that doesn't mean that Murat and Saint-Cyr will be slacking off. Of course, if you both wish to rest then I can leave the defence of Paris to you

both.” Tu said casually, hoping to incite them.

“How can your majesty leave all the glory to Ney?! In that case, all my cavalry will dismount and participate as infantry!” Murat protested

“Relax, our king is not finished yet.” Saint-Cyr, on the other hand, was calm.

At this, Tu was a little perturbed as his “plan” failed... “Though the cavalry will not be participating, you will transfer a portion of the warhorses in your unit to Lannes. This is to ensure his artillery can reach the battlefield in time.”

“Doesn’t Lannes’s artillery unit have their own horses? Why does he need more?” Murat said as he looked disdainfully at Lannes who returned his glance head-on and Murat could only turn away to look at Saint-Cyr.

“We borrowed 110 guns from the feudal lords around Paris, and with the newly manufactured howitzers, we have this many...” Lannes extended 5 fingers...

“And so, our overall plan involves positioning all our artillery units in the forest at the backside of Fort Carré. The reason for this is that the large trees will provide excellent cover.”

“Ney, Murat, Saint-Cyr, you will bring all your infantry units onto the battlefield and provide cover for Lannes. When the signal is given, you are all to charge into the Fort.”

“Oh, the remaining cavalry units will be stationed in France. It will be troublesome to bring them along to a forest battle after all.”

“Signal? What kind of signal and where will it come from?”

“Grouchy’s mission is to lead a small unit and infiltrate the Fort from a secret passageway and create havoc from behind enemy lines as well as give the signal. It will just be a fire or something, so if you see flames coming from the Fort, that is the signal!”

“So that’s why Grouchy was in such a hurry, But why didn’t your majesty leave this to me? I’d definitely do this better than him! I swear it on my epaulets!” Ney protested once more, to which the others laughed.

“My dear general Ney, are you a kid playing house? Do you want to be ‘daddy’

that much?" Saint-Cyr mocked, and another wave of laughter rang out.

Jokes were fine, but now wasn't the time for that.

"Lannes, come over here." Tu summoned Lannes over, and whispered in his ear.

After Tu was done, Lannes left with a look of admiration, "Your majesty really is a genius..."

"All other participating units are to wear civilian clothing instead of military uniforms. You will fast march toward our destination and secure the area before Lannes reaches the destination point! Your troops are to arrive in 1 day. When they do..."

"Yes sir!"

Chapter 13: How to act like a smart aleck

Before he could finish, Tu's words were drowned out by Ney's yell and the 3 bowed simultaneously before excusing themselves.

"Though I'm quite unhappy at being interrupted... Seeing them fired up is good. Time for me to prepare as well."

The plan was about to begin and the 'chisel' to smash the 'rock' has been prepared...

"Grouchy... Grouchy... Grouchy... Come quickly damn it..." After the meeting ended, Tu had been pacing in his room. Every second seemed to make victory one step further.

— Ah how I wish I could hug the goddess of victory right now.

Such insane thoughts kept floating in his mind.

"Your majesty... The 300 sets you wanted... Austrian military uniforms... Have been prepared... In the main hall!" Grouchy huffed and puffed as he pushed the door open— No, slammed it open.

Tu heaved a sigh of relief. This sort of waiting was terrible to bear, and it felt like the sword of Damocles was floating atop his head. But now that Grouchy was here, the sword would be gone...

"Did you get the trading permits which the central feudal lords signed with the southern feudal lords?" Tu hurriedly asked without giving pause to Grouchy.

"Gu..."

"Quick, stop drinking water." Tu forcefully pulled down Grouchy's hand which held the water flask and Grouchy could only show his unhappiness on his face.

"Ah... Your majesty, of course I did. When did I ever fail to complete the missions your majesty assigned me?"

"Good, leave the uniforms here. Now pick 300 men from my personal guard and have them gather at the backdoor of the Palais. When you're done, hand

the permits to Lannes and the rest.”

“Pick a number of people and take side routes to get to the destination after Lannes sets off and meet up with him. Remember, don’t bother giving the permits yourself. Time is of the essence.”

“Pick people... Hand over permits... Gather. Yes, your majesty!”

Tu’s string of orders, and his tremendously serious face made Grouchy nervous but he quickly recovered and left after giving a salute.

“His majesty is really impatient huh...” Grouchy muttered as he left.

“Now is time for the act.” Tu took down the Joysword from the sword rack and walked out of the room, his next destination was—

— The garden, it’s time for my performance.

Today was strange, the guards assigned to herself had increased and they kept a close watch on her, such that her past freedom was completely curtailed.

— It feels like I’m actually in a prison now, though this prison has the luxurious cover of a palace...

Dawn’s mood was terrible today because she stepped out of her room only to find dozens of guards waiting for her. They were fully armed and greatly restricted her movements— It was utterly dreadful.

“Looks like something big is happening... Even a prisoner like myself who has nothing has to be kept under such a close watch.”

Dawn could only lie on the big silk bed and think of what might have happened but couldn’t think of anything and rolled about, making her long golden hair twirl about on the bed.

...

Just like that, time passed.

Dong...

Da Da Da...

Sounds like a door opening and hurried footsteps.

“Gr...”

These muffled voices seems like that of the king. The doors weren't shut tight. How careless was he? Dawn really couldn't understand how such a person could have won.

“Forget it, no point thinking about this. Guards, I'm going to the garden to see the flowers! This is something your king permitted me!”

Dawn' agitation grew, and for some reason she seemed to be in high spirits at the thought that the she was now a great distance away from the palace in Vienna, and she wished that these days would continue.

But that wouldn't be likely. France would definitely trade her away.

“Alright, miss. Please come with us.”

Probably only the flowers understood her.

...

As Dawn was admiring the flowers, a rushing figure caught her attention. It was the king again. Ever since she heard the long speech he delivered, her interest in him grew, and she wanted to know more about him.

(TL: This is the only time when talking about politics nets you a girl...)

Dawn couldn't help but to stare at Tu. This was something unprecedented. Ever since Dawn entered the palace in Vienna, she had never paid attention to a man...

— Her fixation was almost like that of an artist to the model the artist was painting a portrait of.

He looks pretty good in a military uniform and a sabre by his side...

Eh... He's wearing... Isn't that the Austrian uniform for generals?

— How did he get Austrian military uniforms?

— What is he going to do?

Dawn's gaze went from a relaxed one to one filled with panic— And also fear.

She seemed to, no she definitely knew what was up.

— “I will share your burden...”

— “Karl’s letter arrived...”

...

“Hu...” Dawn now knew what she had to do.

“Gentlemen, I think I’ve had enough. It’s time for us to return.”

Looks like she had to help Karl, on account of that face that they were comrades, even though she didn’t actually like him very much, and hated flirtatious playboys like him.

— But I’m still a member of the royal army.

— Even if I’m now in the “enemy”’s palace.

Tu now headed for the backdoor of the Palais, and wasn’t too pleased with his performance since he was, after all, not a professional actor, and had to put up a show of being frantic that had to also look natural.

— He would rather face the enemy on the battlefield instead of this, And if he overestimated that woman, then this plan would be over.

— I can only hope that woman is as smart as I think she is, and she is as loyal as she seems.

Forget it, no point thinking. He had instructed the personal guard in the Palais to place people all over to keep watch 24/7, especially at night— When the time comes, he will know...

“Soldiers, raise your flags up high and keep them up whilst we march to the north!”

By the north, Tu meant the Barker mountain range that separated France, Austria and Prussia. The mountain range spanned hundreds of miles and restricted passage between Prussia and France. It was covered with a variety of trees and shrubs, making it the perfect training ground for mountain warfare.

— And it was just one day away from Paris, and one day away from Fort Carré.

“Move out!”

At the same time, Lannes and the rest left according to Tu's instructions, and were all in civilian clothing, with their cannons separated and packed in boxes used for crops. The 10,000 strong were separated into 10 groups which set off at different times from the 7 gates in Paris.

— Their destination was the same. Everything they did was to fool the enemy. But there was a part of the plan that fooled even them.

“Where did his majesty go? Wasn't he supposed to be the main force?” Murat began discussing with his personal guard as he didn't understand what was going on.

“I heard he was going to Barker in the north. Supposedly there's a special unit there...”

“Forget it. Leave the king's plans be. Kid, when we begin fighting, you better be more ferocious!”

“Our unit will definitely be the first in our charge, my respected excellency.”

“Hahaha... I won't let that fellow Ney steal my glory!”

Quickly, quickly, quickly!

Soon, I will reach. That is the key to my victory. I really can't wait, haha...

He was now galloping as he led his troops on a fast march toward the Barker mountains and he felt his excitement grow with every step.

Come on, come on, come on, my goddess of victory.

...

French Army Camp, deep in the Barker Mountains

Ever since Tu took over Paris, he had transferred a small portion of his troops to be put to harsh mountain warfare training in the Barker mountains despite the lack of numbers.

As there were almost no mountains between Austro-Hungary, and France, who was the number one enemy, mountain warfare training was something unnecessary and every general objected to this. Only under Tu's lone insistence

did the plan pass.

— Now was the time to see if my lone insistence has borne fruit.

“Your majesty, why have you come?”

“Oh, Davout, I’m here to give you combat orders. Your time of glory has come..”

Davout was originally the commander in charge of defending Paris, and after he received the orders to train the troops, he brought about a 1,000 of the most elite of troops from Tu’s personal guard to this deserted mountains and begin training.

Thus, it can be said that the most elite of the personal guard was not present during the Battle of Aude.

— To think that the Austrians were thrashed without my best, they really have nothing going for them besides numbers,

“I order you now, to pick 300 of your men here who know how to speak German and change into this clothing here now. Arm yourselves appropriately and then follow your king as we set off for Fort Carré.”

“Now... But, your majesty... Where is the clothing you speak of?”

“On their backs, these are the new trainees I brought.” Tu said as he pointed at the 300 behind him.

Now, what kind of play would unfold?

Chapter 14: Into the waterway

8 hours before ‘Smashing the Rock’ is executed, Fort Carré

Karl’s army, which included his personal army along with troops from Hungarian feudal lords around Budapest, numbered about 25,000. They had dragged their exhausted bodies night and day as they rushed to the western borders of France. By the time they reached Fort Carré, they were on the brink of collapse.

— They had been on a forced march for 4 days and nights, and had set out from Budapest for a French fort that hardly any of them had heard of.

“We can finally have a good rest...” A feudal lord soldier moaned as he lay on the ground. “I really can’t take much more of this sort of marching. I’ve never even walked that far in my life.”

“Yeah...” Another man released his heavy gear as he agreed.

“But didn’t that Prime Minister Karl say something about wanting to teach the arrogant Frenchies a lesson? He’s probably just sore over what happened in Aude... And now we provincial troops have to suffer.” Another soldier said as he lay down beside the first.

“Oi! You lot! Stop laying there and wasting time, look what I found!” A slightly plump soldier said excitedly behind them.

“What... I have no interest in anything besides sleep now.”

“It’s wine! So much wine! Just nearby!”

“Tch, alcoholic.” The 2 on the ground grumbled disdainfully. “No wine beats that of our hometown.”

Fort Carré, Karl’s temporary command room

“Did Mary come?” Karl asked as he picked up a bottle of quality red wine and poured 2 glasses which he placed on the map that lay out on the table. He picked up 1 glass and inspected the blood red contents as he shook the glass.

“My respected Archduke Karl, I apologise but Mary said she was unwell and stayed back in Vienna.”

“Hai, why are these women so shallow... Feeling unwell? She didn’t seem unwell at all that night? Does that mean she just doesn’t want to come? Never mind, you can drink this glass with me.”

Karl did not seem unhappy at all, and gave an expression that seemed like it was normal for him, and raised the other glass to his adjutant.

“Your excellency, we are presently in France... And Paris has issued a warning already...” The adjutant’s voice was weak and soft, and transmitted the words he meant to say but didn’t— That this was enemy territory and they ought to be careful.

“The feudal lords nearby are all loyal to our great Austro-Hungarian Empire. There’s nothing to be afraid of. Besides, we’ve been marching for so many days now. It’s time we let loose for a bit.” Karl raised the glass once more and looked at the adjutant.

“But...” The adjutant looked at the map, “We...”

“Stop looking at the map! This is an order!” Karl yelled out angrily as he used his other hand and swiped the map to the floor.

“Karl... You’ve changed so much... Has that big victory really changed you?...” The adjutant muttered softly as he raised the glass helplessly.

— Why are the contents in this glass so red? Such redness, it reminds one of blood...

“What are you mumbling about? Come, to a long and prosperous life for our Emperor!”

“To a long and prosperous life for our Emperor...”

“Don’t be so sombre. I’ll give an order to let everyone be on off for tonight, so they can all have a goo drink!”

“Ah?! Your excellency is really too messed up... Uuuu...” The adjutant was about to protest but another glass of wine shut him up, and a third, and a fourth...

“I don’t believe that those Frenchies can fly here from Paris.” Karl said indignantly.

When the time comes, how shall I receive Dawn? She should probably repay my saving her right, well then...

— I’m getting excited just thinking about it... Maybe I did drink too much...

30 minutes before ‘Smashing the Rock’ is executed

As the night grew darker, apart from the found of rustling leaves and the calls of beasts, the sound of raucous partying in Fort Carré filled the air.

Though most of the troops had by now gone into dreamland from the long march and copious amounts of liquor, a number of them were still drinking and partying.

— They were the late night shift of guards.

— Or perhaps, the new batch of alcoholics.

After drinking a large amount of alcohol stored in the Fort, they began to complain about their officers.

“Our officer is way too weak... He’s always pulled along by Karl... If I were him...”

“Our officer too... He’s just a sycophant... All he knows is... To kiss Karl’s...”

Dong!

All these men were drunkenly lying on the floor and one of them caught sight of a platoon with his blurry vision.

— The things you see with such vision isn’t always real... Apart from us, there’s no one here... What other squad is there to patrol at night besides us...

A night breeze made the flame of a nearby torch flicker and he managed to catch a clear glimpse of these people— They were all wearing the same uniform as he was... The one at the head was even carrying a sword by his side... And that sword was emitting some sort of... Light...

Forget it, don’t joke around, how could a sword be emitting light? ... It’s probably another night patrol... I’ll just... Sleep first...

Just an hour ago, Tu had brought the 300 troops to the side of Fort Carré. He went around the designated gathering point and built a pontoon upstream before using it to cross to Fort Carré through a secret underground tunnel.

Tu was actually rather familiar with Fort Carré as he had personally led a 300,000 strong force formed from a coalition of Deutsche feudal lords across the Barker mountains and attacked Fort Carré from Austrian territory. In the end, he was only able to break the Fort that had only 4,000 men defending it at the cost of 20,000 on his side.

When he was leading the siege, he nearly died to a stray bullet to save someone...

That was a thing of the past. After he took the Fort, Tu personally scoured its insides and had found this secret passageway then— Which now greatly served him.

This secret passageway was built as a means of retreat for the garrison. After the non-aggression pact was signed, it had become abandoned and was now just an ordinary waterway.

“Alright, we’re here... Everyone down!” Tu ordered as he entered the passageway first. “Warriors, you will now be facing the enemy. For the sake of your ideals and beliefs, be prepared to fight tooth and nail. I now order you to separate yourselves into 3 squads, One will follow me, and the other 2 will disperse themselves amongst the enemy’s stores and armory. When the fire appears, it’s showtime!”

“I hope it will all not come to waste. Everyone who contributes tonight will be rewarded by me! All those who do not obey will be cut down on the spot!” In the secret passageway, Tu’s words got the 300 personal guard troops, who were already eager to fight, even more riled up.

“Long live the king!” They cheered, slightly softly to maintain their cover.

“Take off your capes, move out!”

“For France!”

30 minutes before ‘Smashing the Rock’ is executed, Fort Carré, Karl’s

temporary command room

Unlike his adjutant who was now currently collapsed in his tent, Karl was still conscious.

“Looks like good wine has to be paired with good women huh.” He sighed helplessly.

“Eh?” He heard the cry of an eagle, but why would there be an eagle so late?

— Wait, this cry, it sounds like it’s approaching me. I might as well go have a look since I have nothing to do anyway.

Karl walked out of the room and raised his hand which was in a black glove up high as the eagle landed on his arm.

— Looks like there’s a letter attached...

Karl was a little stunned when he opened up the letter but he quickly recovered and began guffawing. “Hahaha, Dawn is really thinking for me huh. Why couldn’t she have said so in the palace? Haha... How could there be a French attack on me? This place is so far from Paris...”

Karl waved his hand and sent the eagle away before throwing the letter into a bonfire nearby.

— What a joke, how could a Frenchie with such an uncool name be my match? It’s almost 1am... Time to sleep...

Karl yawned and went back into the room...

At this time, Tu’s troops had successfully entered Fort Carré and had begun their respective missions while Lannes and the rest had made it to the gathering point.

Several thousand artillery men had reassembled 500 heavy guns which were separated into 4 echelons, and were now in position with all guns pointing toward Fort Carré.

“Grouchy, didn’t you have a special mission to execute? Why are you with us now?” Lannes asked Grouchy, who reached Fort Carré with his troops as directed by Tu just as Lannes’ men were finishing up their work.

“Eh? ... My orders said that Davout would be in charge of the special mission?”

“Davout? Isn’t he conducting training in the mountains? How could he come here?”

“Then...”

The 2 went silent.

Chapter 15: The hottest part of a flame is the outer part

25 minutes before 'Smashing the Rock' is executed, Fort Carré

"What a bunch of drunkards, to think they dare to party the whole night long even when they're deep in enemy territory..."

— These troops weren't about to be defeated by their enemy bullets but by their own fixation with alcohol. It's a waste these troops aren't mine...

Whilst stepping aside the Hungarian troops which lay scattered throughout the Fort, Tu began slowly making his way toward Karl's temporary command room.

As he ridiculed the Hungarians in his heart, he kept up in his guard, just in case Karl's emergency squad would pop up all of a sudden.

The emergency squad was Archduke Karl's specially created squad and was first deployed in the battle between Russia and Austro-Hungary in the closed beta.

To prevent an enemy night raid, he had specially deployed several dozen of his personal guard to patrol his encampment apart from the usual patrol.

As these members were given their duties at the last minute, their passwords were different and it was difficult for spies to infiltrate them. This tactic became widely used after it was made known.

But emergency guards were only used when they were deep in enemy territory as it was far too complicated and there have been cases of friendly fire between guard patrols due to differing passwords.

— That really was a popular joke then.

But today was really special. It seemed like Karl completely did not think of Tu as a threat, even though they had not ever faced each other in the closed beta after all. Did this fellow really think he was invincible?

— Looks like I'll have to teach him a lesson tonight.

Tu smiled and the tension receded somewhat from his face. He pulled on the white silk gloves and drew his breath before continuing to search using the light from the bonfires nearby.

Almost there, almost there, almost there. Karl's flag was there! The flag wasn't swaying due to a lack of wind tonight but Tu could still clearly see the sword on the flag.

— Just a bit more to victory!

"You lot! Halt!" Just as Tu was bursting with joy, a harsh commanding voice stopped him. Looks like the emergency guards were here after all.

"You lot, leave Lord Karl's room immediately! Don't interrupt his rest!"

Tu grew serious as he silently walked toward the speaker and moved his right hand toward the bow on his back while the troops behind him began moving their hands towards the swords at their waists.

"You lot! Have you grown tired of living after getting drunk! Looks like I'll have to teach you the meaning of respect!" The leader of the emergency guards was by now hopping mad and had drawn his sword as he angrily stomped toward Tu. But as he walked closer, he began to feel that something was amiss.

"You..."

Sou...

— A single arrow tore through the silence of the night and buried itself deeply into the leader's skull.

Looks like they can only join the stage early since they've been exposed!

"Ene..."

"Hu... Hu... Hu..." Tu heaved as he shot out 3 arrows in quick succession.

Tu's troops quickly charged up and cleaned up the other emergency guards but Tu still heard the thing he did not want to the most.

"Lord Karl!! ... Ah!"

No matter how careful and quick they were, an emergency guard was still able to raise the alarm. Soon, other emergency guards would be here his plan to chop

off the head would then fail completely.

Tu could not allow this to happen and quickly charged into Karl's temporary command room.

— Karl, I'll let you taste defeat!

Another 100 meters, 50, 30!

Faster! Faster!! Faster!!!

Tu kicked open the door to Karl's temporary command room, whilst his troops kept Karl's personal guard who were rushing over busy, and saw what he did not want to see most.

— The room was empty. There were maps haphazardly left all over the table and bottles of red wine left at the side. A chair fell over beside the table and a single boot was left behind unworn.

— All this told Tu that Karl had already left and he felt a massive setback.

"He runs really fast huh, as expected of the ace of the 'Three Knights'!" Tu could only ridicule the person wasn't here and took out 3 arrows as he turned and picked up the flag on the ground.

"Send out the orders, light the fires!"

After they quickly mopped up Karl's personal guard, Tu's troops swiftly set fire to several dozen tents under Tu's orders.

Very quickly, Fort Carré's armoury and stores were lit up as well following the signal, and pillars of flames shot up and lit the pitch black night sky as Tu's troops continued to pour fuel onto the nearby tents which made the flames spread faster and faster.

"The Frenchies are upon us! Archduke Karl has left us!"

"The Frenchies are upon us! We're doomed!"

Tu's troops then began to spread word that the French army had attacked using Austrian German— Though this was actually the truth, albeit slightly early.

The initial shock from awaking to see flames sprouting turned to terror as the troops that slept close to Karl's room saw their General's tent engulfed in

flames, and they were soon cut down by masked enemies.

“Karl has escaped! The Frenchies have attacked us!”

The flames swallowed up many Austro-Hungarian troops while the lies spread by Tu’s troops shattered their morale as smoke filled their eyes and panicked shouts filled their ears.

Several officers frantically tried to restore order after they woke up but were overwhelmed by the chaos and all they could do was utter any and every vulgarity that ever existed in German while explosions that could be heard from miles away resounded throughout Fort Carré.

— This was the signal to attack.

“Go!” Tu’s troops followed the plan and quickly gathered at the exit of the underground secret tunnel in a very short time.

— They were now hiding from the cleansing by the impending cannonfire.

Hong!

Lannes’s first echelon of 125 guns began firing large caliber artillery shells that weighed several tons aimed at Fort Carré’s interior.

Many Austro-Hungarian troops were unable to hide in time and died to the explosion directly or had their organs shattered by the shockwave and fell into a pool of their own blood...

But the remaining Austro-Hungarian troops did not roll over and give up. Even though just one round of fire had passed, they persevered and rushed toward the eastern gate— That was the door to hope and life for them.

Usually, cannons would always require time for loading so using this time frame to escape was a wise choice and definitely possible but...

“Second echelon, fire!”

Lannes utilised a triple line tactic that overcame this weakness of the artillery by splitting the entire battalion into 3 echelons and having 1 echelon fire at any one time whilst the other 2 would load the guns.

(TL: This is basically like Nobunaga did with his flintlock battalions.)

This dramatically closed the gap between each round of fire and was effectively continuous fire— But this was limited only to heavy artillery and required the protection of infantry units so the artillery troops could concentrate on loading, unloading and firing.

Hong!

Yet another wave of cannonfire landed and Lannes's troops reduced the Austro-Hungarian numbers dramatically once more before a third and fourth wave fell. So intense was the bombardment that even the earth shook!

In just several minutes, Fort Carré was subjected to bombardment by several dozen tons of steel and gunpowder, and the mighty unbreakable walls had already begun to collapse before ultimately shattering to the fourth wave which tore open a large hole in the southern walls.

To conserve gunpowder, Lannes halted at the fourth wave.

“Our turn now! For France! Charge!”

Almost simultaneously with the end of the fourth wave, Ney and the rest charged forth with their troops and were able to make it into the Fort with almost no resistance. The battle was now over...

Chapter 16: Burn the tyrant, take the women

Unlike in Aude, this was not a battle. It was a massacre.

The scent of gunpowder mixed with the thick smell of blood made one want to puke. Bodies were strewn everywhere on the charred earth, many of which were unrecognisable. The battlefield of Aude had swords stuck in the ground and broken rifles, which could at least make for a tragic painting, but this was a clear picture that laid bare the sins of war.

“Quickly bury these soldiers and get a priest to pray for them so they may not need to suffer any further.” Tu couldn’t bear to see it, and though his generals did not understand his urgency, they still followed through.

In part because of their loyalty and respect for their king, and in part for their acknowledgement of their king.

“Looks like we have indeed chosen the right person to follow.” Murat said as he elbowed Ney.

“What good is there about this? He took credit for everything! Haha!”

“Haha...”

Tu did not pay attention to their conversation and directed his gaze toward the southern parts of France.

— What beautiful rivers and mountains...

“We’ll return to Paris by the main roads once the battlefield is cleaned up.”

— Paris oh Paris, looks like I can execute the plan on that side soon.

The news of their victory quickly reached the towns surrounding Fort Carré where many people awoke from the thunderous bombardment and had rushed out of their homes as they thought there was an earthquake only to witness Fort Carré be engulfed by flames.

And so word spread like wildfire and soon the entire southern region of France had heard of the fall of Fort Carré.

After cleaning up the mess at Fort Carré, Tu led his troops back to Paris along the main roads this time. Along the way, they received grateful welcomes from the people who were thankful that they no longer had to suffer humiliation by the Austrians.

Because the southern feudal lords required the protection by the Austrian Emperor, they would always pay tribute to the Austrian royal family annually—Though instead of tribute, it was more akin to a protection fee.

Of course, the feudal lords wouldn't pay this out of their pocket and would raise the necessary funds through taxes levied on the ordinary people.

And so, the king who defeated the Austrians over and over was known as the liberator to the people.

To the southern feudal lords, it was like a horror show as their rightful king had descended upon their lands out of nowhere with his troops and had laid waste to the 20,000 strong personal army belonging to the leader of the 3 knights, Karl, at the cost of just 12 men.

The thunderous bombardment that broke the walls of Fort Carré also broke their will to resist and they realised that they would be fools to continue to swear fealty to the Austrians in Vienna.

And so every feudal lord opened their city gates and led cows and goats as a symbol of their surrendering of their lives and fates to their king, and swore fealty to Paris.

Tu laughed as he accepted their fealty and told them they could maintain the status quo of self-governance so long as they would adhere to orders from Paris before continuing on his way back.

It was a flawless and complete victory with the fealty of the belligerent south and the love of the people. But was that really the case?

Tu did not think so, and he knew that there still remained those with strong animosity towards Paris and he had to find a reason to rid France of all of such feudal lords.

But before that, Tu had something else to do. Though Karl had escaped, the strategy was a success and all that was left was the plan in Paris.

Now then, how should he conquer a certain someone?

A few days later, the suburbs of Paris

Because they had to accept the various feudal lords who came to surrender, Tu's return to Paris was delayed by 1 day. But this did not impact Tu as it would not impact his upcoming plan.

Because for this plan, he still needed to wait for 1 more person.

"Your majesty, the captain of the palace guards is here." Tu revealed a relaxed smile when he heard the words of his subordinate and the Joysword began to emit a fire red light that was so bright that even the sheath couldn't hide it.

"Tell him to come in."

"You majesty, I have followed your majesty's orders and kept watch over the palace and a 100m radius around it for the past 2 days and have found evidence that the prisoner tried to communicate with the enemy."

The captain brought out something like a letter from his sleeve. It was a slightly yellowed piece of paper that was rolled into a tiny scroll and gave off a faint smell of lavender.

Tu received the letter and slowly opened it. The only words were: [A storm approaches from the west, a clear future lies in the east.]

"That does fit her style... Does she think I won't know what she means by writing it like this? Haha." Tu laughed and placed the letter into his breast pocket.

"Are you sure of it? Where did you get it?"

"I am sure, your majesty. Our men observed her releasing a pigeon in the wee hours and we shot it down thereafter. We then retrieved her letter and made a forgery following her handwriting before sending it to Karl using an eagle. The one your majesty has is the original."

— Not bad, she was able to sneak out of the palace despite being kept under watch by several dozen guards. Looks like I have not misjudged her.

"Your majesty, we are ready to arrest her at your order."

“Arrest who? Let me tell you, that person is very important. She will decide our next battle. You may leave for now.”

“But your majesty...”

“This is her invitation letter to France! Hahaha!” Tu laughed as he pointed at his chest. All of a sudden, he thought of something and stopped laughing.

“Wait, don’t leave first. Let me tell you something...”

Chapter 17: You can't play without paying

Paris, Palais des Tuileries

After Dawn had sent that damned letter, she felt uneasy day in and day out. Her pigeon had not returned and this meant that what she did had been found out. Though the guards assigned to her had increased, no one was sent to take her away yet.

Dawn has now been prohibited from going out of her room for several days now so all she could do was pace the room which was several dozen square feet or sit in front of the black wood desk with gold embossings and read some of Gödel's books, or stare at the ceiling as she lay in bed.

Every time she heard the guards exchange some words, she would be slightly more entertained but as the day of return for the French king drew near, she wondered how long she could stay in this luxurious prison.

"If I hadn't stupidly sent out that letter, would I still be able to speak with that king?"

Thoughts like these would always fill Dawn's head as she was deeply interested in the man and was conflicted over her return. She wanted him to return safely so she could talk with him, but she also wanted him to take his time so she could stay in this country longer.

— Was this possible? Obviously not. Dawn could see herself being thrown into an actual prison and have cockroaches amongst other foul pests as roommates in the near future. But even so, would she still be able to see him?

— Why did she have to reveal his plan? Even if he were magnanimous, he wouldn't be able to tolerate someone who revealed a national secret to the enemy, much less someone who was a prisoner.

— Although the life she had was definitely not one that a prisoner should be privy to.

"Why did I let him down? A person like me, should have been sent away."

Dawn often had such mental conflicts which were born out of an uncertainty

of her fate, as well as the knowledge that she had both betrayed her nation as well as her benefactor, and made her question who she ought to fight for.

She couldn't save herself, nor could she save others, and that was how she landed in such a predicament.

"I just... Want to speak with you..."

Dawn got up, and walked up to the windows and gazed at the colourful flowers outside, and the gigantic fountain whose waterfalls were dyed golden by the sunlight that shone down. She put her hands out to touch them, but all she felt was the cold glass. And her eyes began to fill with tears as her hand slipped down the glass.

Dong Dong Dong

— Several knocks sounded on the door, looks like she was going to be executed. Even if she were thrown out of Paris, what difference would it be with death?

— Would she have to return to the fractious, sexist palace?

— That fate had swallowed her once. Now that she had finally escaped, would she have to return?

"Madam, his majesty is waiting for you in the main hall."

"Oh... I got it." Dawn hurriedly wiped her eyes dry and tidied up her clothing so she could leave a good last impression.

"I knew this would happen, but why did I still do it? Keke..." Dawn muttered on the way to the main hall.

— If only her country was France...

Dawn was escorted by several dozen guards to the main hall. 6 opaque screens were placed in between the giant pillars, forming a channel.

From the sounds that came from behind the screens, Dawn could tell that there were a number of people behind the screens, probably a hundred or so.

"Do you really need that many to judge me? Looks like the king thinks quite highly of me huh." Dawn said softly, as she felt sorrowful.

— Looks like he knows, has their fate run its course?

Dawn tried her best to suppress her emotions so the king wouldn't be able to guess what she was thinking.

"Today's weather is pretty good. No rain in the west, but the sun hasn't risen in the east though." Tu said calmly and took out the letter from his breast pocket and flicked it in front of Dawn. "Don't use lavender again, change your perfume, Avenue des Champs-Élysées is not too far away from here."

It seemed like Tu was teasing an old friend rather than interrogating a criminal. "Well then, do you have anything else to say, beautiful lady?"

"I... Have nothing... To say..." Dawn replied expressionlessly, as she stared at Tu.

— She tried her best to remember how he looked like for she feared she would never be able to see him again.

"Oh, well then, I'll deliver your sentence.

Dawn remained silent.

"Dawn, presently Knight-Captain of the Austrian Royal Army, and representative for the Vienna royal family in the 3 knights of the Austro-Hungary Empire, soon-to-be commander of the French king's personal army..."

— Wait, did she hear something weird? What did that man say? Commander of the French king's personal army? When did she have that position?

"Now, I, no France's king, Tu Dacre Jerry, hereby welcome you on behalf of glorious France. You shall become a member of France and your name shall be engraved into this glorious history!"

"Hu..." Tu took a deep breath after delivering this sentence.

Dawn was shocked speechless at this line of inexplicable words, "What are you saying..."

Dong... The screens fell down and several dozen soldiers came running out, several of whom were even in the uniform for generals— 2 of whom Dawn had even seen in the Battle of Aude.

The last time she saw the French troops, they held swords and muskets and surrounded her but now when she saw them, she was still surrounded as before but the feeling she had was completely different from before.

— In their hands, they held bright red, snow white... No, roses of every possible hue and colour.

“Please say yes to his majesty!” Dawn’s heart shook at the one voice the soldiers yelled out in.

“Please say yes to his majesty!” The guards that had escorted her also brought out flowers from god knows where and Dawn was surrounded by a sea of flowers that completely overcame her mental defences.

Just one more line left.

“Come, say yes!” Tu said as he extended a hand covered by a white silk glove embroidered with the flower of Dawn’s hometown.

“You actually... Went to that much trouble... To investigate... I give up...” Dawn was now tearing up as she saw that she had completely fallen for that man’s show and it was time to surrender.

“Alright I’ll say yes!” Dawn yelled out as she leapt into the man’s arms and let out the tears that she had wanted to shed for a long while.

“Alright, alright.” Tu said as he rubbed Dawn’s smooth long hair that was like golden silk and gestured with his eyes to the soldiers.

— Now was their alone time.

“Dawn, from today onwards, you will be the commander of my personal guards, and will be directly under my command. No one else’s opinions will affect my judgement of you.”

“Un... Un...”

“And,” Tu said as he grasped Dawn’s shoulders and stared into her blue eyes, “You will have to change your name after you join France.”

“I’ll... Leave it to you...”

“Justice Angela Mariel, you will be given a position in Orleans. What do you

think?”

“Justice, it’s a nice name. I’ll go with whatever you say.” Dawn’s face loosened and her smile was refreshing.

“Well then, Justice, I look forward to working with you.”

“Un, my sword is your majesty’s sword.” Justice declared as she wiped her tears, her smile more radiant than ever before.

Chapter 18: This is a gentleman's duel, so...

Paris, Palais de l'Élysée

"... After this battle, we, France, once again proclaim to the world that we have the power to completely decimate any enemy that dares to threaten our sovereignty and will meet any attack with full force!..."

Every newspaper and tabloid in Paris sent representatives to [Tu]'s speech, which was interrupted multiple times with raucous applause, so much so he had to gesture for those present to be quiet several times so he could finish it.

The fantasy-like victory had enraptured all citizens of France, and the announcement room was filled to the brim with reporters. There were no such thing as cameras so artists were present to sketch the dignified appearance of the Prime Minister as he delivered his uplifting speech.

"Really, there were simply too many people." [Tu] said as he finally extricated himself from the surrounding reporters.

The northern feudal lords had proclaimed their fealty, as did the western feudal lords. The governmental representatives he had sent were already on the way too. Everything was progressing so fast, even he found it hard to cope.

"Your excellency, his majesty wishes you to do something personally."

Just as he was about to enter his office, [Tu] was stopped by a military personnel— His military uniform had a dragon motif on it, so he should be part of the king's personal guard.

"What is it?"

Because of the beautiful new addition to his personal guard, Tu was extremely busy.

He had taken out 3,000 cavalry from his original personal guard and placed them under Justice's command, and formed the old guard from the 1,000 troops which had been trained in mountain warfare and other troops taken from the reserves.

Apart from overseeing the training of the new recruits, Tu also went down to the defence ministry to see what the other generals were up to.

Justice, however, was bored as her cavalry troops were the elite amongst the elite in all of France and apart from maintenance training, she had nothing much else to do with them.

“I’m really bored... When is your majesty fighting a war again?”

Every time Tu met this beautiful girl, she would complain to him and Tu would try and avoid her. He had no plans for battle presently after all, and the training of new recruits would take some time. Personally, he hoped that there would be nothing to surprise him in the near term.

“Ah... You want to fight that much?”

“That’s right. Apart from seeing flowers, all I do is browse the shops at Avenue des Champs-Élysées. If this goes on, I’ll become a slothful person.” Justice said as she looked straight ahead with her deep blue eyes— Straight at her superior.

“Eh, you’ve braided your hair, and in a ponytail too.”

Justice had tied up her long golden hair in a braided ponytail. Her original coldness and distance was gone now, and she felt more refreshing, innocent and energetic— Though she was a general that walked the perilous battlefield.

“Does it look good? I changed my hair to suit my mood.”

— If you’re asking that, I can’t possibly say anything negative right?

“It suits your style.”

“Oh, what style am I?”

Tu felt awkward as he had said it on a whim, not expecting this trouble to come.

“A, umm, cute style, yes.”

Though the king had easily dominated the battlefield, he struggled to find the right adjectives in his head.

“Ha... Hahaha.” Justice couldn’t help but to laugh when she saw Tu’s helpless face.

“Never mind. Why don’t I be your sparring partner? My swordsmanship is fairly good.”

“You said something really fun now huh... Alright, your majesty, I’ll go prepare at once. Don’t say I’m bullying you later.”

“Don’t underestimate my swordsmanship too.”

— That said, Tu knew that Justice, the only woman amongst the 3 knights of Austro-Hungary, was not well-known in the Empire for nothing. The ones who could match her in swordsmanship could only be counted on 1 hand even if you looked at it on a global level.

And Tu himself only concentrated on training his marksmanship for bows and guns in the closed beta so if he was to engage in a sword spar with this beautiful lady, he really hoped she would show him mercy.

Palais des Tuileries Training Grounds

“Since I asked you to risk your life for me, then using my body for your training is something I ought to do. I don’t want to become the kind of foolish king who thinks that he can gain the loyalty of all just by sitting on his throne.” Tu said as he picked up a bamboo sword at the side. By his feet lay a long bamboo stick as well. These were for training purposes and could only inflict flesh wounds no matter how hard the attack was.

“Your majesty really knows how to joke huh.” Justice said as she moved her hand, which felt cold to the touch, across Tu’s chest, neck and face.

“See it with your own eyes then. I’ll prove it to your majesty, my will... My loyalty to your majesty.”

“You still can’t trust yourself fully so you’ll leave yourself to me and you want me to trust you right?”

Justice nodded and retracted her hand. She then reached out and tightly held a bamboo sword that was lying against a target board.

“It’s time. Ladies first, please.” Tu was ready as well and looked at the girl opposite him seriously.

They were currently standing in the center of a human wall of soldiers who

surrounded them with about 10 paces separating them. Justice was now still fixing the knee and arm guards as well as her clothing and when she was ready, “Begin!”

As though signalling the start of the duel, the bell in the nearby church and the clock in the training grounds began ringing.

“Hu!” The one who attacked first was the girl and her golden ponytail floated in the air as she closed the gap between them in 1 lunge and stabbed her sword out at which Tu did not make any move in response.

“What is his majesty doing?” All the troops asked in shock.

“This attack...”

Tu exhaled and swung out swiftly with his bamboo sword and deflected her with one move. The sound from the smash between bamboo swords made it clear that the attack wasn’t friendly in the least.

The sword that was deflected slashed down across Tu’s shoulder.

“Hu...”

After stopping the attack, Tu drew back his sword to regain his stance but Justice had stepped forward.

“Guu...”

A strong kick landed on Tu’s knees.

Tu had no choice but to take a few steps back and he began to look seriously at his opponent— The commander of his personal guard.

“Fight me seriously, your majesty!” Justice exclaimed as her battlelust was ignited. She swept out with her bamboo sword, lifting up the dust from the ground with the wind from the attack.

As he frantically blocked the attack, a smile floated up on Tu’s face, “It’s only just begun!”

Both sides closed the distance at the same time, and Justice stabbed continuously while Tu parried and defended.

The bamboo sword, which was thicker than Justice’s slender arms, moved so

unbelievably swiftly in her hands that it seemed more like a thin rapier.

“Is the king being suppressed!?” A shout came from the soldiers.

“Is this the level of the 3 knights huh? Hu... I can't find any openings at all, should I use that?” Tu said as he blocked Justice's attacks and looked at the long spear on the ground.

— I prepared this for special circumstances, should I lose to her? I haven't planned for it, but alright, I'll just let myself be wilful for once with this sword then!

Tu kicked away the long spear and concentrated on defending. He seemed distracted, perhaps because his opponent was not one he could go all out on.

But the problem now was that Tu could not put in too much strength into swinging his sword to deflect the incoming attacks as it would splinter. At the same time, the only way to defend was to deflect and parry.

— Since he has chosen to defend and counterattack, whether he is attacking or defending now, he must take care of his sword so the girl is the one with the advantage.

As the duel progressed on, soon the tables were turned and it was now Tu who was attacking and Justice who was defending.

Tu was still energetic and would even twirl his sword from time to time as a show of his remaining stamina. On the other hand, Justice was panting.

“You need more physical training, my princess!” Tu said mockingly as he lowered his attack frequency.

Justice's skirt was sliced earlier on 1 side and revealed her long white legs.

“Haa... Haa... I won't be surrendering, just because my breathing is a little ragged, your majesty!”

“Then come! Hu...”

“Is that so... I see... Then I won't surrender!”

Both of their wills to fight were ignited and Justice kicked off the ground and lunged forward as she slashed down with all her strength.

“Iyaaaa,” Tu raised his sword to block,

“I’ll destroy that sword!”

Gachi...

Tu’s sword was broken, and was unable to block’s Justice’s attack. In his hands was a mere broken stick.

It might have been intentional, but Justice had been striking at the same spot all this while, and thus, the sword had completely broken from that attack.

“Wh...!?” Not just Tu, everyone else was shocked at this.

— All that was left in Tu’s hands was a stick that was only the length of a shortsword, though that could still be used for combat.

— But since the sword was broken, the attack was not successfully blocked.

“Ah...” Even though the broken sword did absorb some of the shock, it still hurt considerably.

“I really lost to you...” Tu said as he fell, and smiled at the panting Justice, whose red puffed-up cheeks made her look even cuter than she usually was.

Cheers, sighs and shouts came from the surrounding crowd that was so raucous that it seemed like the entire palace shook.

Justice hurriedly threw away her sword and rushed up to Tu.

“My princess, you’ve won. Now will you please bring me to the infirmary, haha...” Tu laughed, hoping to alleviate the tense atmosphere.

“Uuuuu...”

Justice nodded and helped Tu up.

“You really put a lot of strength into that, I’m going to have to... Take a nap first...”

And so the duel ended in a win for the new commander Justice. Tu had thus achieved his aim of helping the new girl gain the trust of the troops.